

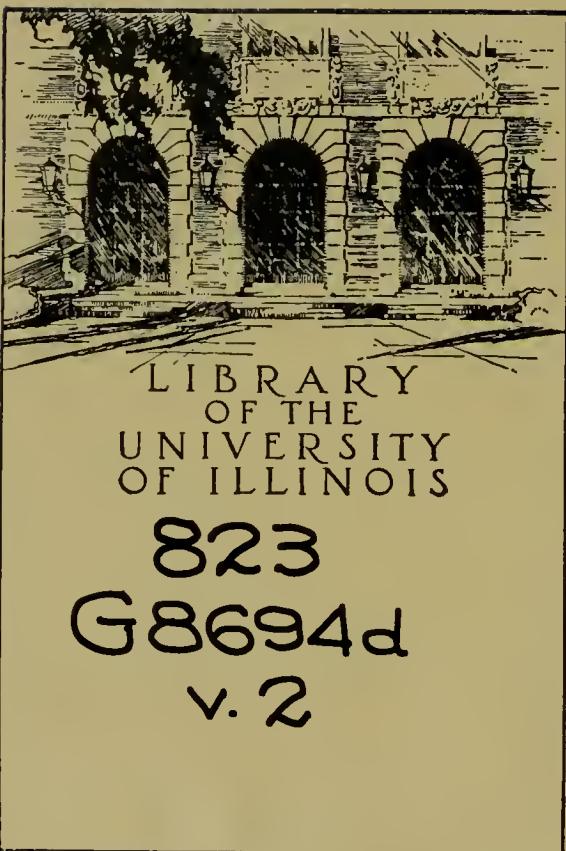
DR
SINCLAIR'S
SISTER

EDWARD GREY

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DR SINCLAIR'S SISTER

BY

EDWARD GREY

(Author of "Concealed for Thirty Years")

IN THREE VOL'S

VOL II

LONDON

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CHAPTER XVIII.

AN ECCENTRIC OFFER.

“ Do you know, Mr. Humbert, that I have been accompanying you nearly two whole hours,—and Marc has fallen asleep,—and it’s getting quite late ? Don’t you think we had better stop now ? ”

“ Stop ?—Why should we stop ?—I’m so happy, I don’t know what to do ! Aren’t you happy ? ”

“ Yes, I am. I think music’s lovely, but,—but I’m very tired, too.”

“ Are you ? ” said the violinist gently, laying down his violin, and coming close to the piano-stool, where Claire was seated. “ *I’m* not. I couldn’t be tired with my precious companion and you by me ! How can you be happy and tired ? When *I’m* happy, I forget to be tired.”

"I do that sometimes," said Claire dreamily, "when I'm feeling happier than ever. But to-night I'm *too* tired. Don't you think it is time for you to be going?"

The violinist never went until he was told to go, so there was nothing out of the way or uncourteous in Claire's plain question.

"Do you *want* me to go?" he asked grumpily, leaning down and resting his elbow on the piano board, and thus bringing his face on a level with hers.

"No,—I didn't mean I wanted you to go, exactly," said Claire, avoiding his fixed gaze by moving herself slowly round on the turning stool. "I *like* you being here very much, you know, but,—all the same, I'm tired—very."

As again she gave him her reason for wishing him to go, she stopped her circular motion, and raised her brown eyes to his. They were tired-looking, with dark circles beneath them, and the eyelids heavy, as if they could hardly keep themselves open.

"Come and rest yourself in an easy-chair, then," said the violinist eagerly, taking one of her passive hands in his. "Come and

rest, and I,—I will stand by your chair, and watch you.”

“ Watch me? What for? I couldn’t rest or shut my eyes if I were watched !” said she, half-laughing.

“ Ah! but *do*,” said he, excitedly; “ I must watch you—I must look at you,—I have waited all day,—I have been looking forward to it. I cannot go, I cannot wait;—I must watch;—you *are* so beautiful.”

“ I’m not,” said she, rising and colouring, “ you are thinking of what you dream of when you are playing some of your beautiful music. I’m not what you think I am;—it’s only your fancy that is beautiful,—not me.”

“ No, no,” said he rapidly, resisting her attempts to free her hand from his, “ you are wrong. It isn’t my dream, or my fancy, but it’s you,—*you* that are beautiful to me.”

“ But I’m *not* beautiful !” said she quietly, turning her face from his, “ and I’d rather you wouldn’t think I am. Let my hand go, please; I want to wake Marc up,—he won’t sleep to-night, if he sleeps so long now.”

“ I will not let you go,” said he, with passion, his sensitive face working convul-

sively and his purple eyes flashing, “you shall not wake him up, until you have listened to me. Why won’t you believe me? Don’t you know that there is such a thing as a dream made real? And you,—you are my dream, only you are real, and therefore better,—because you can be near me always, nay—more,—you shall be, for you are mine,—mine.”

“Don’t,” said she firmly, no longer struggling to get her hand free, but standing before him with drooping eyelids, “you don’t know what you are saying, Mr. Humbert. Your violin is yours,—can be always near you; but *I’m* not your possession, and shall only be with you now and again. You will never care for anything as much as you do your violin.”

“What?” said he, startled at the plainness of her words, “because I love my ‘brother,’—my sweet companion,—my second self,—may I love nothing else? Because my soul is full of music, and I am strange to other men,—do you tell me that I have no heart, and that I cannot love aught else than my own genius? Is that what you think?”

He spoke with the bitter pain of being misunderstood. All the light had died out of his eyes, leaving them dull and expressionless. And the mouth, beneath the yellow moustache,—trembled.

Claire looked at him, at first immovably ; for, still she thought that he had been overwrought by his own musical emotions, and that he was half-carried away by his passionate phantasias. But then, as still he gazed at her with his face so still and pained, and his whole lithe figure drooping,—she felt sorry for what she had said.

“ No, Mr. Humbert,—I don’t think that,” said she gently, laying her released hand on his arm, as if asking his forgiveness for her former words, “ I think that you have a heart that will love someone, who will love you. Besides your — ”

“ And, can’t *you* love me ! ” cried he eagerly, a wave of light and colour flooding his face ; “ can’t you come with me and be my own,—my beautiful,—the darling of my heart,—my fair one,—my dream ? Ah ! —*can’t* you love me ? ”

A pang of regret shot through Claire’s

heart. Had she been trifling with this enthusiast, that he had learnt to love her? Had she been treating him, as if he were but a *music power*, capable only of loving music? Had she forgotten that, beneath all his eccentricity and oddness, might lie a man's heart? For, there could be no misunderstanding him now; it was no longer his genius only, burning to utter itself forth.

"Don't ask me this," she said sadly, tears filling her eyes as she spoke; "I don't love you, Mr. Humbert, I — "

"But, *can't* you love me?" he broke in wildly, seizing both her hands, and looking down with trembling eagerness into her troubled face. "Have I not played to you and softly told you what you were filling my heart with? Have you not *felt* me asking you to give me some of your love? Ah! I have told you many, many times in my music, that you must come with me,—come with me and be my bride! Have you never heard me call? I thought my 'brother' would put it sweeter to you than I could. I asked him to speak,—to tell you first,—to win you,—to captivate,—to — "

He broke off suddenly, and flung her hands from him.

“Has he played me false?” he cried darkly, seizing his violin, and fiercely raising it to his shoulder. “Have you,—have you learnt to love *him*?”

“Yes, I love him,—he is so beautiful, so sweet,—when you are happy with him,” replied Claire, hoping to appease him by her being able to say, that she had learnt to love his dearest companion.

But, alas! she had misunderstood the meaning of his sudden fierceness, accompanied by his eager, jealous question.

“He *has* played me false then!” he shouted, laying the bow upon the strings and bringing from them a cry of anguish; “he has won your love for himself, and not for me. He has been to me as an enemy, and not as a brother. He has —”

“Good Heavens, Franz!—stop that unearthly cry, or—you’ll drive me mad. What in the name of all that is music, can induce you to—”

Violin and violinist had fled. Dr. Sinclair, at length awoken by the piercing cry that

Franz Humbert had drawn from his instrument, stopped short in the middle of his sentence, to find his erratic friend flown, and his sister standing, white and tearful, looking after him.

“Claire,—what does this all mean?” he said laughing, getting up and going towards her.

He had had a hard day’s work, and had been up all the night before; so, he did not think it necessary to excuse his own bad manners in falling into the heavy sleep, from which he had just been aroused.

“O Marc!” she exclaimed in self-reproachful tones, running to him and hiding her head on his breast, “I am so *dreadfully* sorry, but I didn’t know,—indeed, I didn’t.”

“Didn’t know what?—and, so sorry for what, Claire?” asked he, trying to hold her from him, that he might look down into her face.

It dawned upon him faintly that, perhaps, this precipitate flight of Franz Humbert’s, was owing to something more than his usual eccentric manner of coming and going. That quivering cry that he had called

unearthly, may have been more than one of his friend's visionary complaints, with which,—at times,—he seemed to take a horrid pleasure in lacerating both himself and his hearers.

Claire clung still more closely to him.

"Marc, you know, I never thought," she cried incoherently, "I wouldn't have hurt him, or make him wish to,—to,—oh ! Marc,—you know I wouldn't."

"Don't dear," he said gently, smoothing back her rumpled hair, and trying still to raise her face to his, "try to be quiet a minute, and then tell me what you are talking about,—and what you want me to understand. How can I know when I have been fast asleep all this time?"

"I *wish* you had been awake, and then it wouldn't have happened," she said ruefully, breaking from him and going towards the corner of the room, where the piano stood, "Oh !—look,—see, Marc," she added dejectedly, "he has left his gloves and his ring and his red handkerchief and oh !—he'll never come again, and I *do* like him very much, but—I *couldn't* love him."

Her brother frowned; and, without a word, followed her to the piano, closed it up with a bang, seized hold of the violinist's belongings, and marched out of the room.

Claire looked after him,—frightened. Was he angry with her? Wouldn't he believe her when she told him, that she had never thought of the violinist's loving her,—she had always looked upon him as being so wrapped up in his music, that there was no room left for thoughts of anything else? Would her brother think that she had been trifling with his friend? She hadn't,—she knew she hadn't; she had never been anything but her own natural self to him. She had loved his beautiful music; she had liked accompanying him, when he came in the evenings; she had been very gentle and kind to him in his strange ways. But, it had all sprung simply from a feeling of "liking" and general good-nature, mixed,—perhaps,—with a certain sweet compassion for one who was so unlike all other men, and therefore had so much ridicule and miscomprehension to meet with. But, as to loving him in the way he wished her to love him,—she had never dreamed of such a thing.

Dr. Sinclair did not remain out of the room for more than a few minutes. When he re-entered, the frown on his face was gone; there seemed to be a look of amusement there instead. The thought of the eccentric Franz, imagining himself in love with anything that was not a dream or a fancy, had struck him in its absurd light; and made him think how silly he had been to have felt angry at Claire's not very lucid avowal.

“So,—he thinks he is in love with you, does he?” he said playfully, going up to her where she still stood near the closed piano, “and you,—little tender-hearted thing,—think you must believe him? Is that how matters stand?”

“Don’t laugh, Marc,” said Claire wretchedly, her lips drooping, and her eyes still with large tears trembling in them, “it’s all true. *I* thought it was only his fancy at first, and told him so,—but, it isn’t. It’s real,—and I’m miserable about it.”

“Well, but you couldn’t help it,” said he, clumsily trying to comfort her, “you’re not a little flirt, Claire,—you haven’t tried to make him love you?”

"I? No, of course not," said she, indignantly, "I shouldn't know how to, if I did try. But," sighing heavily, "that doesn't make any difference, Marc,—and I don't know what to do."

"Why,—there's nothing for you to do, exactly," said her brother prosaically, "except,—tell Franz, when you next meet him, that you're very sorry, but that it can't be,—and that you hope he will forget all about it soon. That's to say, little sister—"

He paused a moment, and then jerked jealously out with—

"If you are sure that you don't like him well enough to one day—love him, you wouldn't fret yourself so much about what has happened. You wouldn't mind so much hurting his feelings."

"I *am* quite fond of him, that's just it," said she, tearfully trying to explain the state of her feelings, "and I hate causing him any pain and disappointing him, because he does feel things so dreadfully. But, as for being in love with him, Marc—"

"Well,—would it be so impossible, Claire?" he put in, as words seemed to fail her.

“Yes,—quite,” she said decidedly, breathing heavily as she spoke, and a great rush of colour flooding her face. “Do you think I would ever marry a *pretty, womanish* man, who doesn’t do any good in the world, except make music and dream dreams,—which don’t help anyone or anything? When *I* marry I shall—”

“I *thought* you were never going to marry,” interrupted he gravely, “I *thought* we two were going to live together all our lives, and not let anyone separate us?”

“Yes, yes, that’s quite true,” she said vehemently, her great brown eyes flashing as she spoke, “but I only wanted to tell you, *if* it were all different, and if I *were* going to marry. Marc,—I’d marry a *hideous* man as long as he was a right down strong man, not a namby-pamby snob like Lambert, or a soft, pretty man like Franz. But,” quieting down a little,—“oh!—I *am* sorry about Franz. Do you think he will forget soon?”

As she put this last question, she sank down into a chair, completely exhausted with what had passed.

Marc bent down over her.

"Claire," he said anxiously, "I can't have you fretting like this. You must go straight off to rest, and try and sleep."

"But I can't, Marc,—indeed I can't," she said restlessly, "I am *so* sorry for him, and,—what do you think?"

She stopped short, and a half-pathetic smile passed over her face, as though she were recalling something that would have amused her, if she had been in any other mood than the one she was now in.

"Well—?" said he.

"He has such funny living kind of ideas about his violin,—his 'brother,' as he calls it," she said pensively, letting her eye-lids fall over her tired eyes as she spoke, for they were too heavy to keep open any longer. "He actually thinks that, somehow,—instead of his violin making me love him, it has played him false, as he calls it, and kept all my love for itself. Do you know, Marc, I feel quite frightened about what he will do to his violin, to-night. He gets so fierce and wild when he is unhappy.

Her brother made no remark.

He was thinking;—wondering whether his eccentric friend were really in love with his sister, or whether it were a momentary mania that had seized him.

“ Marc,” whispered Claire softly, slowly opening her eyes, “ couldn’t you—”

“ Yes,” said he, “ I will. I was just thinking the same thing. You were going to say—‘ couldn’t I just step across to his house, and see how he is, and what he is doing ? ’ ”

“ Yes, that was it,” she said, heaving a great sigh of relief, “ and, you will, Marc ? ”

“ Yes,” he replied, putting his arm round her slender waist, and drawing her up from her chair; “ but, to please me, Claire,—not for your own sake at all, but for mine—go off to rest at once, and trust me to do what I can for poor, old Franz; and to see that both he and his violin are coming to no harm.—Will you, little sister ? ”

The gentle appeal was quite enough.

“ O, Marc,” she said, pressing her hot face to his, “ how good you are ! How could I ever *want* to marry, or love anyone else, but

you? Good-night,—I will try to forget and go to sleep quickly, because you wish me to. And I know you will do quite the best with —with him. Tell him how sorry I am,—and that I *am* very fond of him, but that I couldn't—*love* him."

"How childlike she is!" thought her brother, to himself, as,—having lit a candle for her,—he watched her drag her weary footsteps up the stairs.

How long would she remain so simple-hearted and innocent? How long could that feeling of hers, that she could love no one except himself—last? Not long,—he meditated rather bitterly,—the woman's heart in her would go out to someone sooner or later, who would take that first place in her affections which he, now, so dearly held. All her repeated vows that she never wished to marry or to love anyone as deeply as she loved him, would fly to the winds then. He knew she could not always be his possession, as she now was. Yet, every time he tried to face this all too possible probability, he felt his heart weigh as a lump of lead within, and a sense of utter loneliness and desolation to

seize him. Would life be worth living without her?

It was between eleven and twelve o'clock, when Dr. Sinclair started out to see what had become of Franz Humbert. He had not delayed a moment after he had watched Claire's light disappear round the corner of the staircase, and had called out his last good-night to her. Secretly, he felt a little anxious about his friend's whereabouts and doings. For, he understood something, not only of the violinist's peculiarities, but also of those deep, sensitive feelings, those passionate emotions, that—more than anything else—had been the means of drawing his own nature towards him. If it were only a passing fancy,—this love of his for Claire,—he would probably find him at his home in his music-room, engaged,—either in crying out upon his violin for the return of his beautiful fancy, or else,—sitting in sullen, dreamy moodiness over his instrument, because it refused to hear, or reply to, his call. But, if his love

were no dream, or fancy, of an enthusiast, but the real feeling and passion of a man, then—, but here, Dr. Sinclair's thoughts stopped blank. He only hastened on his steps in fear of what might, or might not be.

The clock had struck one,—two, of the morning hour, when Dr. Sinclair returned, letting himself noiselessly into the house with his latchkey. He trod lightly to the high, oak chest, on which, before he left, he had placed the hall lamp, with its light lowered. Slowly he turned it up, and blinked hard at it as he did so, then, with a shaking hand, he carried it into his own sitting and consulting room.

With the minute care and precision of a person who is entirely unconscious of what he is doing, Dr. Sinclair placed the lamp on his table, placed a shade upon it, gathered up a litter of papers, neatly piled them together, opened and shut again two or three of the small drawers of his writing-table, and then, finally, turned his easy chair half-round with its back to the light,—and sank with a groan into it.

“ What a weary world this is ! ” he muttered half-aloud, covering his haggard face with his hand. “ Is there no life beyond ? —no haven where one can be at rest ? —no place where every happiness is not followed by the dark fiend of misery ? Surely it’s better to die than to live if——Ah ! God ! —is there no man to make me to *know if Thou be*,—no man to convince me of a Divine Ordering, of a Divine Knowledge ? —Take,—God, if Thou be,—take the years of my life, but—give me certainty—”

His spirit was dark as night within him. His soul was striving to feel for the God, it refused to own. The very consciousness of *being*, was a burden to him. The very knowledge of knowing nothing, of holding nothing, of being sure of nothing,—drove him to despair.

It was only natural that he should have returned to his home feeling undone, and as if all life were a burden and a mistake. The two hours he had spent with his friend, had been hours in which he had been witnessing the devastations of acute agony of mind and heart. He had found the violinist, helpless,

—stricken,—reckless, in his unconsolable misery. For the darling fancy and dream which, at length, this enthusiast had clutched passionately hold of, as a living reality,—had refused to be his. Even, as he had held it, it had fled from him ; even, as he had spoken to it, it had rebuked him and told him to go back again and search and live in his fancies only. “What then was life,”—the emotional man cried,—“but a dream? What then were the men and women of the earth, but ghosts and shadows? What was idealism, but unrealism? What was love, but an agony of longing, over which the heart must break because—it *was not?*”

Dr. Sinclair felt his weakness and his fatal insufficiency, when brought face to face with a man, who—for the time—was in the very hell of despair and wretchedness. He could not deny what Franz Humbert frantically asserted. He could not reason away those very doubts and fears that had—at times—risen as black shadows in his own groping mind. He could not pour oil on the troubled waters, when he knew of none. What, then, could he do? What, then, in the time of

overwhelming darkness could he say, that would give light ?

Nothing.

But, because he was bound to Franz Humbert, by the ties of friendship and co-feeling ; because into his heart crept a deep pity, when he saw him sitting alone, with his companion set aside far from him, and all his musical instruments closed and silent ;—therefore, Marcus Sinclair had done what he scorned and hated himself afterwards, for doing, though—at the time—it had seemed the only possible way of showing his sympathy, and of being a friend to his friend. For the sake of his friend therefore, he had been untrue to himself. For the sake of giving a limited, miserable portion of valueless sympathy,—he had confirmed and declared his own disbelief in God, which *before*, had been a tottering, yet blindly clinging belief. For the sake of doing a *semblance* of that good which he found himself unable and powerless to do, and therefore had to put a shadow in its place,—he had sold his own soul. He had *agreed* with Franz Humbert, in his wild and false assertions. He had

taken his hand, and with a thick cloud before his eyes and a stab of agony in his heart,—he had avowed that they lived in a World of Chance, with no Omnipotent above them; that they were as ghosts and shadows flitting across the horizon,—miserable, wretched,—because, though they seemed to touch and to be,—they could not, they were not; because, though they seemed to love and be beloved, it was but a passing dream, but a lovely phantasia.

Condemn him not too hardly, in that he so acted. There are thousands of men and women whom we meet every day, who do the same kind of thing, and yet—we seem to think no worse of them. Men and women who scruple not to say one thing one moment, and to recklessly deny it the next. And this, not only in connection with their worldly affairs, but in connection with their religion, their morals, their standard of right, and their God. Are they any better, or any more to be excused than Marcus Sinclair? Nay,—surely, rather the less. For, it was only under the painful pressure of being unable to show his sympathy and aid his friend in any

other way,—that he had spoken words and agreed to beliefs, which in the depth of his heart—he knew were not true. It was with the growing knowledge that, his concurrence with his friend's passionate declarations, was proving as a sedative to the unstrung nerves, and as a *Nepenthe* to the torn heart,—that he had gone further than he knew. For, it was only *after*,—when he had watched the overwrought violinist sink into a peaceful slumber, with his violin by his side,—that it struck him what he had sold, for the sake of that sleep. And,—few of the men and women whom we meet daily and who sell what he sold, have been as hard pressed as he was.

CHAPTER XIX.

AMBROSE LIDDON.

THE new Rector had been installed in Abbeyslea Parish, a little over a fortnight, when,—long before the excitement and talk about him, and about the way in which he had first appeared in Abbeyslea Church, had subsided—another excitement arose. It was still in connection with him, and was a means, perhaps, of adding fuel to the fire of gossip that was already burning.

And this was the cause of it:—

The chief lady in the Parish,—Mrs. Forrester,—was in the habit of giving a large “At Home,” towards the end of August; when the fruit was ripe and she could spread her table with such quality and abundance, that none of her neighbours could attempt to vie with her. At this seat of hospitality and splendour,—for, all the best silver was produced, and everything was

arranged in a most elegant and costly style,—all Mrs. Forrester's acquaintances, in fact, all Abbeyslea with the pointed exception of those people who were not *the* thing,—were invited.

As the time drew near, for the expected arrival of the invitations, the question was at first whispered, and then—losing its shyness—was put to the bar of public opinion, as to whether Mrs. Forrester would invite the new Rector of her Parish or no. It was certainly quite a matter worthy of the public's consideration, for it, naturally, admitted of many diverse opinions. It was a theme upon which many hot discussions could be brought to bear ; it was also a matter in which everyone must be interested, as it would more or less affect them, when the time for the meeting of Mrs. Forrester's large assembly should arrive.

It would be impossible to give any estimate of the conversations which had ensued, when the stranger, who had so boldly attacked and condemned Mrs. Forrester,—made his appearance at the vacated Rectory. No one could mistake the face of that stranger ; no

one, either, could hear his voice, and not know it a second time. For the “*common*” man’s voice was particularly musical and penetrating; and his enunciation so clear and refined, that it was quite a marked feature of himself. So, the first who saw him, which—quite by chance—happened to be Mrs. Forrester, herself,—for she was as curious as most to see what kind of man this ‘Reverend Liddon’ was, who had been given the living in the place of Mr. Gambray—knew that the new Rector was not the entire stranger, he was thought to be.

Mrs. Forrester’s spleen towards the man, who had publicly,—in the face of all her friends and acquaintances—upbraided her, had had neither time, nor inclination, to wear away. Of course, she had after that Sunday received many calls of condolence, many praises for her dignified conduct towards the ‘monk,’ or ‘shabby methodist,’ who had made such an uncalled-for commotion in the Church and in the Churchyard! Of course, no one was straightforward enough to tell Mrs. Forrester to her face, what they pretty nearly all thought, namely—that she

had brought it on herself, had well deserved it, and that they admired the man who had been man enough to do what this stranger had ! It was naturally understood that it would be a distinct breach, not only of courtesy but of—something more important still—*policy*, to do anything so foolish or simple. It was easier, more judicious, and more the law of the day, to tell Mrs. Forrester that she had acted quite rightly, that her pew was hers, and that she could admit, or not, as she chose. It was more worldly wise to keep in her good books, by raising her into a kind of heroine of scrupulous righteousness and rightliness, and to condemn her aggressor as a blasphemous monk,—than it was, to give her any idea of what was really thought.

Mrs. Forrester, herself, took the condolences for her refined suffering, and the praises for her excellent conduct, in a very tragic, and—to her—novel, way. She tried a tactic, she had never thought it necessary to use before ; one, which, had she but known it, did not suit her at all well. For, it did not, for one thing, become her blonde

and rather placidly beautiful face, to assume an expression of injured innocence. The air of pious martyrdom, was not what it was ever meant to wear. The face was too large, too hard, too coldly sculptured,—to admit of its expressing, with any effect, what she wanted it, in this case, to express. The result was, it expressed—nothing.

But, though Mrs. Forrester distinctly failed in the face-farce, she undoubtedly succeeded in the voice one. By some subtle ingenuity, she seemed to lower the intonation of her voice by one tone; or, it might be, even, two. Naturally, she had a high, clear, rather dictatorial voice; but, after that Sunday, it became a lowered, even-tenored, churchy voice. It gave its hearers the idea, that the owner of it had once been falsely accused; had once been through the fire of miscomprehension; had once been suffering in the cause of right. It also expressed a grand, charitable forgiveness of all that had been done against the owner of it, which the face tried to portray also,—but failed.

When Mrs. Forrester had first caught sight of the new Rector, and had, in a moment,

recognised who he was,—she had made her way back to her home in absolute silence ; though, on the way she had met several of her acquaintances, with whom — under ordinary circumstances—she would have dropped into conversation. It was not fatigue, that made her so unlike herself ; for, she was never too tired to talk. It was not that those whom she met, were not *the thing*,—or, were not interesting enough to talk to ; for, one of the people she met, was Franz Humbert, and she had made a point of always speaking to him, and being very friendly and, almost, affectionate,—ever since she had taken away his character and called him “mad.” But, Mrs. Forrester walked with her eyes straight before her, and saw—nothing and recognised—nobody. Those, she met, thought—by the expression she bore —that she was engaged in religious meditation ; and wondered that she was not more excited and more curious about the expected arrival, that was filling *their* minds. They did not, for a moment, guess, that Mrs. Forrester had seen walking into the very door of the Rectory, the “common” man, who

had, a fortnight before, so boldly withstood her.

“John,”—Mrs. Forrester had said to her husband, when she had reached her home—“this house is *my* house,—I’m going to sell it.”

She very often liked to tell John—what he knew already quite well—that the prosperity, they enjoyed, was on her side, *not* on his.

“John,”—she continued, letting her voice assume its usual, high, dictatorial pitch, as only her husband was near to hear her,—“the society in Abbeyslea is detestable, and I am only lowering myself by spending the best part of my years here. Why have you always upset my plans about moving;—if it were not for *you*, I should have settled in London long ago, and have had a most select circle of acquaintances round me, by now. You *always* go against me if you can.”

Mrs. Forrester had never so much as expressed a wish to leave Abbeyslea before; but she imagined she had, and that somehow her good-natured, long-suffering, and much-loving husband, had prevented her.

John expostulated gently ; but she had more to say, so he was soon cut short.

“Mr. Gambray’s leaving like this, and turning out such a *bad, unprincipled* man, is enough to make any Christian give up her home here, and go where the clergyman of a parish is *made* to stay until he dies,”—she said righteously,—then, waxing indignant and moral, “What do *we* know of this man appointed in his place ? He may be *anybody*, and have no *pedigree*. He may be a Methodist, a Congregationalist, or a monk—got into the Church of England, because he wants a good living.”

John, however, said decidedly that he did not think this was at all likely ; as the Church of England could be trusted to be fairly particular about the matter. Mrs. Forrester did not like him saying this, and so grew still more indignant ; and, thus, without further beating about the bush, disclosed the true cause for the present, tumultuous state of her feelings.

“John,—you talk absolute rubbish,” she said contemptuously, preparing to sweep, with a good turn of her head, out of the

room, “as if *I* don’t know a great deal better than *they* do. And to think of their going and appointing that *blasphemous* man, to take *good* Mr. Gambray’s place! And I don’t believe he’s married,—or got any relations living with him, or anything—either. It’s perfectly monstrous! And he,—that very man—who called me a ‘*common*’ woman, too! If you had been anything of a husband, John,—you would have told him back to his face, that—though everyone else might be common in the world, that *your* wife wasn’t. I shall sell the house and leave this detestable place,—that’s what I’ll do. I have had enough to put up with it all along, and I shouldn’t be here even now, if I hadn’t thought it was my *duty* to raise the tone of these people, and do as much good as I could among them. *I* wouldn’t flinch, to save myself;—nobody could accuse me of *that*.[”]

There was a distinct purr of self-content, as the last few words were uttered; which augured well. John sighed a sigh of relief. If his wife once got upon the laudable theme of *duty*, she would think twice about her intention of selling the house. Her con-

summate idea of *duty*, would not allow her to do this, surely !

But this is but a passing glance of what happened behind the scenes with Mrs. Forrester, on the arrival of the stranger man as Rector of Abbeyslea. *On the scene*, there was quite a different show. People soon became aware that Mrs. Forrester's lowered and injured, though forgiving-innocenced, —tone, was still used with winning effect, when she spoke of the new Rector. True, —she questioned the shape of his nose, as not possessing the aristocratic outline that spoke of a pedigree ; she remarked upon the inadvisability of men being appointed as Rectors, when they were unmarried ; she put his eloquent extempore preaching down as blasphemous ranting ; she called his devout, almost rapt, reverence of mien, whilst officiating in the House of God, “extreme cant,” —and she found out many other things and picked out many other holes. But, she did all with the air of benign forgiveness,—benign sweetness and forbearance of these *defects* ; crowned by the almost overwhelming charity in seldom referring to

the fact, that she had been rebuked and, therefore injured by this man.

Thus, it was, that many people in Abbeyslea, when they—a little later than usual—received their formal invitations to Mrs. Forrester's “At Home,” thought it most probable that the Reverend Liddon would be honoured, also, by the receipt of one. Some, however, doubted; thinking that, however much self-confidence and *sang-froid* Mrs. Forrester possessed, it would not be equal to carry her through the mere possibility of a repetition of the scene, that had ensued in Abbeyslea Churchyard, a short time ago. For, they doubted not for a moment, that if the Rector saw that which was not right going on, that he would again speak out and say so.

But, yet another question arose. Supposing Mrs. Forrester did swallow her pride, and extend her charity so far as to invite the Reverend Liddon to her “At Home”—would it suit the Rector's views to accept the invitation? Would he not be the man to say,—“I have other things more pressing, more serious, of more moment, than the meeting of

my parishioners in a social gathering ; where conversation can be but flippant, and where the outlay of delicacies and costly expenditures are prodigal." Would not the man, with his intellectual face and refined utterance, who had classified himself amongst the "common" men, and had told a lady, richly-dressed, high-bred, and aristocratic-looking, that she was but "common" also,—be the man to say,—"When thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, and the blind ; and thou shalt be blessed, for they cannot recompense thee ?" These were the thoughts that arose in the minds of the more thoughtful of Abbeyslea's people, as the time drew near for Mrs. Forrester's At Home. For, they began to see—though faintly and with wonder—that the man who was now in their midst as Shepherd and Pastor, was one who, by the strength of his will and by the mightiness of the purpose within him,—would influence and affect them, perhaps against their own petty wills, and against their own idle inclinations.

Short, as yet, as the time was, since the Reverend Liddon had taken up his abode in

the Rectory of Abbeyslea, he had begun to make his influence felt. He came,—not as a false prophet crying “ Peace, peace, when there was no peace,—because the people love to have it so ; ” not as a shepherd leaving his flock to wander where they will, blinking his eyes to their crooked devices, and shutting them at their unchristian Christianity. He came not saying to himself,—“ The Gospel of Christ is too difficult to preach and too far-fetched to practise,—therefore will I put a soft substitute in its place, which hath an appearance of righteousness, and which will be sweet as honey and soft as wool, to the people’s tender consciences and cultivated tastes.” He came not exclaiming that the Parish, over which he was made head, was one in which he could fold his hands and be idle during six days out of seven, because it was a Parish of well-to-do and prosperous people, who needed neither help, correction, or more than just-Sabbatical instruction. He came not telling of the degradation and wickedness of the poor in the large cities, whose low lives were a continual reproach to England’s name ; he related not stories of

their dishonesty and shame, of their misery and ignorance, and of the great need there was that all means should be taken for *their* regeneration and *their* salvation.

Nay,—the new Rector held other views and had other work than this. When he had walked through a part of Abbeyslea Parish on the way to the old Church, that Sunday when the living had been offered him, and he thought to himself he would like to visit the place, before he accepted it,—he had looked closely to see what kind of work would lie before him. And, as he saw the people laughing, talking, gossiping together, while they made their way to the House of God,—as he overheard the sceptical avowal of Dr. Sinclair,—as he watched the right of unlawful possession, that was carried on in the *free* seats,—and as he heard the deliberate lie with which Mrs. Forrester had sought to preserve the sanctity of her pew,—he knew what kind of work his would be.

But, he did not shrink from it. He recognised the difficulties and disagreeablenesses that would lie in his path. He saw that it would need no common courage, to tell

educated and—*nominally*—religious people that, in many things, they were no whit better than the very heathen, or—at least—than those very ignorant poor, whom they despised and censured. He acknowledged to himself that ten times rather would he work amongst the outcast London, than he would among the Pharisees of modern society. And,—further still—he knelt down before his God, and strove in prayer that it might be the Divine Will for him to refuse this work, which, he knew, if he undertook, he would have to do thoroughly, in the name of his Master. But, during the close communion that a true son can hold with his Father, Ambrose Liddon learnt what the Father's Will was, and bowed his head in submission to it.

Thus, it had come about, that he had accepted the living of Abbeyslea.

Yet, notwithstanding the courage, the almost superhuman power with which, at times, he seemed to be endowed,—he was a retiring, tender, simple-minded man. He hated all show and ostentation; and valued praise at its own vain worth. Intellectual

in mind, refined in taste, and great in thought,—yet, was he guileless as a child ; so much so, that those who recognise not the beauty of simplicity, would despise him for this very quality,—so rarely found in either man, woman, or, even, child nowadays, of over ten years living. And tender !—though his voice could ring with fiery scorn and indignation,—though his words could pierce as arrows, and sting with their plain, unvarnished truths,—yet, was he tender, as the gentlest, softest-hearted woman. No bruised reed would he break, no smoking flax would he quench : the smallest child would lay its baby-hand in his, won by the tenderness of the smile on his face ; and broken,—miserable,—lost—of God's creatures would turn and bless him for the words, that he grudged not to whisper in their ears.

Some of the Reverend Liddon's years had been spent amongst those, whose whole lives are one long struggle to daily gain enough to feed the famishing body ; and who often, from very weakness and lost hope, become cast out because they have been literally *driven* to fall by the very outcry of their dire

necessity. And he, knowing and feeling for them with that wide, brotherly sympathy and great-hearted compassion—*knew*, and judged not hardly.

It was, perhaps, this very tenderness and strong sympathy for those undone and wretched, that had made him—when he overheard the sceptical words of Dr. Sinclair, spoken outside the Church porchway, turn and look at him with a glance, in which was mingled much of admiration. At the moment, probably, he could scarcely have satisfactorily explained the reason for that long gaze of his, or the reason for the rush of something almost akin to joy that had filled his heart. But, afterwards, when he recalled again the dark face of the young doctor, with its restless, inquiring, gloomy expression, he knew what it was that made him glad, rather than shocked to have heard the sentiments that had been expressed.

“He is nearer finding out the lack in his nature, than many of the men who go to Church, Sunday after Sunday, perfectly contented to employ their time there in thinking over their business transactions, or arranging

their pleasure trips ;”—he had said, half-aloud to himself,—“ *they* are sleeping lazily on in the slumber, from which too often they refuse to be aroused ; but that man was straightforward and true enough to acknowledge the mockery of it all ;—to see that if a God, if a Creator be worshipped, He must be worshipped in Spirit and in Truth. I would rather meet that man and talk over the immortality of his precious soul, than I would with many of the men, who are content to mock God in their Service, week after week, and pretend to give what they, even, make no effort to give. That man’s hands are stretched out blindly. perhaps, unbelievingly,—still, they are searching for the Something which, they dimly know, is there and, yet, cannot feel. But, many hang their hands at their sides, knowing,—or, once having known,—that the Hand of God is near, but too indifferent and self-satisfied to grope about and touch It.”

So, it was, that, when two Sundays after, Rev. Liddon had ascended the pulpit and had glanced round, before commencing his sermon, and scanned the faces of those to whom he was going to speak,—that he

sought for the face of the man who had openly said,

“I am as good as coming here to mock God.”

But though he looked again and again at the place, close to Mrs. Forrester's pew, where he had known him before to have been sitting,—he could not see him.

For Marcus Sinclair, more wretched in mind and soul, since that night when he had told Franz Humbert of his entire disbelief in a God,—had declared,

“I will not enter a Church again, until I am convinced that God *is*. If the new Rector is man enough to come to an Atheist, and Christian enough to try and win me to believe in his Christ, then — ”

But, he had not finished his sentence. He thought of the stranger man's strong, earnest face, with its powerful expression of will and purpose, and sighing—added :

“I would give up position, name, knowledge,—everything,—if any man would convince me.”

CHAPTER XX.

MRS. FORRESTER'S 'AT HOME.'

THE "twenty-ninth of August" broke over the land clear and blue and cloudless, with the same hot sun shining down that had been scorching the flowers, burning up the grass, and whitening the roads, for the past two months. There had been no rain, since a few showers that had fallen at the end of June ; and Nature was looking parched and weary, thirsting for the change in the weather that she so sorely needed.

But, though the sun rose on this morning with all its usual warmth and brilliancy, the weather-glass which had been moveless at "set fair," all through these two months, had—during the night—dropped several degrees. Those, who had, morning after morning, been anxiously consulting it, thought that, at last, it was prognosticating the welcome change. They had grown

tired of the blue, cloudless sky, of the steady downpour of heat, of the dusty, burning roads, of the drooping flowers, of the whitened hedges, and of the low, shallow river with its little stream of water, scarcely moving along in its wide, bare basin. And they longed to see the Heavens once again blackened by storm-clouds, and the hot, weary earth freshened by some showers of steady rain. But, at noon-day, as still the sky was blue as sapphire, with no more than tiny, fleecy clouds dotted here and there upon it, the unbelievers in the weather-glass laughed and said,—the stupid thing was predicting what would happen a week, perhaps, a month hence. And, even the staunch upholders of the weather-god were fain to acknowledge that, to all appearance, he was very premature in his calculations.

And this was the day of Mrs. Forrester's 'At Home.'

"Muvver," said little Robin Trevor, about three o'clock that afternoon, when he and Enid and mother were sitting in father's study, because it was the coolest room in the house, "is you going to a big parterty to-day?"

"Yes, Robin," said the mother, smiling at Enid as she answered.

This was at least the ninth time that day, that Robin had asked that same question, and each time with the same, serious inquiring look.

"Muvver,—are Favver going to the parterty too?" asked he, with that sweet, baby ignorance of putting "are" instead of "is," and "is" instead of "are."

How irresistibly fascinating is a little child's natural grammar!

"Yes, little sonny,—Father's going too, only not till quite late, because he's so busy," said Mrs. Trevor, wishing she hadn't to go any earlier either.

"And Enie and Wobbin be just all alone, both to both?" said the little fellow meditatively.

"Yes," answered Enid, folding up the little bit of plain work, she had been learning from mother how to do, "and we will try and be quite happy and good, so that Father and Mother will want to come back to us soon,—shall we, Robin?"

"Will us get Mr. Fowwest to come and

play bear with we?" asked Robin excitedly, ignoring Enid's question, in the charm of his own proposal.

"No, darling boy," said the mother gently, lifting the little fellow up from the floor, where he was playing with his bricks, on to her lap, "because mother is going to the party at Mr. Forrester's house, and so he couldn't come here, but must stay and talk and be kind to all his friends who are —"

"Wobbin's Mr. Fowwest's little fwiend," interrupted the baby-boy, putting his fair head on one side, and looking wisely at his mother, "so, Wobbin may go to the parterty too, and Enie. Shall me go and put me pink fwock on, and me fluffy—fluffy hat,—for to go to the parterty?"

But, Robin's mother had to explain that, though Mr. Forrester was very fond of his little friend, and would like to see him other days, that just this one day, all Mr. Forrester's grown up friends were going to see him, and talk to him and so there would be no room for little boys. Robin, however, proposed father carrying him on his shoulder, because that wouldn't take up any room;

but then, on Enid's saying that she would be left all alone at home, as she was too big to be carried too,—he agreed, quite gallantly, that he would not go to the party, but stay with her.

The little simple explanations to the baby-boy, could never be hurried, because, as Enid would say in her quaint, motherly manner,

“Robin has so many little thoughts in between, that it would be a pity not to listen to them,—perhaps, he will never have just the same again.”

And so, almost before it had been quite satisfactorily settled, as to what the two should do, that would keep them happy and good while mother was gone,—it struck half-past three, and Mrs. Trevor was obliged to rise and hasten away to get dressed for this large ‘At Home.’

Mrs. Trevor had had no particular wish, or inclination, to accept this invitation of Mrs. Forrester's; as she felt she would rather not receive hospitality from a lady, whom the more she became acquainted, the more she discovered she could not like. But, her husband wished her to accept it, and had

promised to join her as soon as he could get away from his business in O—; and thus, without further showing her dislike, she had made up her mind to go.

As she prepared to start out on her long walk to Mrs. Forrester's house, she was quite relieved to see that there would be no need for her to shield herself by her sunshade, from the sun's hot rays. The little fleecy clouds which, all that morning had never seemed to change their size, or shift their position,—were now forming into a thick dark bank, overshadowing the sun and casting a welcome shade over all the land.

The two children accompanied her to the gate; Robin very intent upon admiring “Muvver's softy, sweety dwess,”—and wishing he had got his pink frock on to go to the “parterty” too; and Enid, rather grave and silent, turning over in her mind as to whether she should venture to send a little message to her violin-master,—whom mother might see,—or no.

Just as they reached the gate, and she was deciding with a little sigh, that Mr. Humbert would be too busy playing his

violin to all Mrs. Forrester's friends, for mother to be able to speak to him without their hearing,—Robin, with his baby privilege and faculty of expressing all his thoughts and wishes, without first thinking whether he may do so, came out with,—

“Muvver,—tell Mr. Wellow-hair, he were a cwooss man, when he did come to Enie lastest time; and her did cwy after when nobody did see, only Wobbin. And Wobbin doesn't like Mr. Wellow-hair a bit,—a bit,— and Wobbin will give Mr. Wellow-hair a hard knock and make *him* cwy when he comes again, and dwive him back till . . .”

“Oh! no,—Mother, don't tell him that,”—cried Enid, forgetting, for once, Robin's feelings in her anxiety to stop so cruel a message being given to her dear master,—“but tell him, I am very sorry I was so stupid, and that I got frightened and couldn't play. And,—Mother . . .”

Close by the gate, leading out of the garden, grew a large clump of mignonette. With scarlet cheeks, little Enid stooped to gather three sweet-scented blooms, and handed them daintily to her mother.

“Give him those, Mother, please,—because they are so beautiful,”—she said simply,—and he loves everything beautiful.”

And the mother smiled and, seeing no harm in her little girl’s peace-offering, took the fragrant mignonette. As she did so, she stooped to kiss her two sweet bairns, telling them they might stop out and play in the garden awhile, as it was so shady and cool. And then, with many a look back and wave of the hand, to the little pair, as they stood at the gate to watch her out of sight, she hastened on, knowing she was already a little later than she should be, owing to these “sweet delays,” that true mothers always have.

By the time Mrs. Trevor reached the entrance drive to Mrs. Forrester’s large house, every bit of blue sky had disappeared beneath the threatening-looking rain clouds, that had swelled and darkened over all the Heavens. The little breeze,—which, before, had seemed just to wave the panting leaves of the trees—had dropped, and left the dry air silent, still, and waiting. The flowers were hanging their heads in mock and weary

patience. The few birds, that lift their songs and twitter during August month, with parched throats and folded wings, had hid away in the thick hedges, frightened of the large drops that, every now and again, splashed heavily down.

As Mrs. Trevor advanced up the drive, she could see that, counting upon the continued fineness of the weather, preparations for the entertainment of the guests, had been made outside upon the large lawn and extensively laid-out flower garden, which surrounded Mrs. Forrester's house. Between the high-grown wellingtonias and out-spreading Lebanon cedars that bordered this drive, she could also see—at a little distance off—on that scrupulously well-cut lawn, where tents were raised and chairs and bright-coloured rugs and lounges arranged, that the greater number of the invited guests must have already arrived. There seemed to be not only the sight of gay dresses and light costumes, but also the hubbub of conversation amongst many persons going on.

“A quarter of an hour longer, and everyone on that lawn will be crowding hastily

indoors,"—thought Mrs. Trevor to herself, as she wiped three great splashes of rain, that had just fallen consecutively upon her lightly-gloved hand,—“I hope my bairns at home, will get safely inside, before the deluge comes down.”

At the porchway of the house, stood two tall footmen,—grand men, with flowing moustachios, curled hair, and sculptured countenances. The one showed Mrs. Trevor the way up the dozen stone steps, leading to the open door; the other received her at the top of these steps, and bowed and flourished her on to another grand, machinery man. This one was preparing to follow out his little farce, when his equilibrium was considerably upset by the unceremonious manners of the simple host of the house.

For, at this moment, Mr. Forrester,—having been sent with all speed by his wife to give orders for the immediate preparation of the rooms for the guests, in case the weather drove them in—caught sight of Mrs. Trevor, and hastened forward to her with his usual hearty, sonorous greeting;—

“How d’you do, Mrs. Trevor,—how d’you

do," he exclaimed, extending his great hand, and drawing her away from between the two footmen, while his eyes twinkled all over with laughter at the absurdity of the thing, "Afraid you weren't coming, thought you'd forgotten us, or, perhaps, don't like these big affairs,—I don't;—I never am so bored, or feel so like a fish out of water, as I do on these days. What with best manners on, and not treading on people's dresses, and leaving the things for the footmen to do, and saying right words—why I'm all at sea. Ha, ha,—I was never made for these kind of affairs,—poor Adelaide! she tries to make me do my parts right too! Now,—*she* looks and acts like a queen, doesn't she, Mrs. Trevor?—you were here this time last year, weren't you?—also, in the winter,—you saw her then? Didn't she do it all right style,—eh? Ah! I'm so proud of my wife!"

The footmen's faces did not move a muscle, though they heard the whole rambling confession, made by the great bass voice, as the owner of it led Mrs. Trevor into the large, double-roomed drawing-room; into which already a few ladies,

nervous of the darkening skies, were hastening through the open French windows.

“I’m afraid it looks like rain, Mr. Forrester,” said one of the ladies in a pleasant, company voice, with something new and fresh about it, as though she hadn’t already been making the same remark to those around her, with equal ingenuity, for the last ten minutes.

“Indeed it does, Mrs. Border,” answered the host, striding to the window and looking out,—“and, worse than that, ha!—it’s really coming now, not only thinking about it. Splendid for the gardens,—first rate—will do no end of good,—I’ve been wishing for it all day, and thought the glass wasn’t going to play us false. But, I suppose,—I suppose I ought to think it’s rather unfortunate just now,—ladies’ dresses, and chairs,—I’d better run and help them in.”

Whether he meant the ladies’ dresses or the chairs, he did not stay to explain; they seemed of about equal importance in his eyes. But, as those wise ladies, who were already dry and comfortably seated, looked out of the window after him,—while he

hastily made his way towards that part of the lawn, where the greater number of the guests were congregated,—they saw him stopping to catch up chairs, turn over rugs, etc., on his way, as if he thought that that was one of the things with which he ought to be helping.

Mrs. Trevor could not prevent herself smiling as she watched him; it was so exactly like him to innocently do, one of the things that his wife had probably told him, should always be left for the footmen.

The rain was coming down now with right good earnestness of purpose; and all the ladies, with just a sprinkling here and there of gentlemen, began arriving precipitately in at the open windows.

Mrs. Forrester, herself, trod across the grass with the stately, steady grace of one, upon whom the rain might pour, but could never ruffle or annoy. On her one side was Franz Humbert, looking wet, and cross, and miserable, with his new velvet coat spotting with the rain, and his red handkerchief getting more and more moist, as he angrily tried to wipe away the ugly marks. He didn't like Mrs.

Forrester; but, for all that, she had persuaded him to come, and won him over with praises of his great genius, to promise that he would play on his “beautiful” instrument, for the entertainment of her guests, and herself in particular. Also, as he happened to be near her, when the rain had begun, she had wheedled him into accompanying her at her own dignified pace across the lawn, with another to-be-envied gentleman on her other side. It would never do, or be *the thing*, for her—the hostess—to be seen crossing her own lawn without the presence of some gentleman with her,—rain, or no rain. Neither would it be good breeding to show how annoyed and angry she was with the weather, for not consulting her convenience, before it thought of changing.

“My rooms are so large, that it makes little difference, as to whether we are in or out of doors,” she said benignly, stepping into the room from the low window, and glancing round upon her friends with a queenly air, “I hope that all are making for the house, and not attempting to take shelter in the tents.”

Mrs. Forrester was one of the women, who never grasp the fact that, when they marry, the possessive "my," and the nominative "I"—enlarge into the far grander "our," and "we." She ignored the presence and personality of her husband in everything.

Just at this identical moment, though,—she wanted him, or, at least, wanted him to appear as doing precisely the thing that he, as host, should be doing.

"Where's the master?" she asked in a frigid undertone, turning to one of the footmen, engaged in relieving the ladies of wet sunshades and mantles.

The footman did not know; but thought he had seen the master crossing the lawn a few minutes ago, just after the rain came on.

Mrs. Forrester went to the window. How stupid John was! Of course she could do just as well without him,—in fact, much better; but, for appearance sake, and on this yearly occasion, she must—before her guests—at least *seem* to act in conjunction with him.

"I think," said Mrs. Trevor timidly, as

she was standing close to Mrs. Forrester, and had overheard her question the footman, “Mr. Forrester is trying to persuade some of the people to leave the tents, and come straight here. I can just see him standing by the nearest, and pointing in this direction, as if he were wishing them to venture the few steps in the rain.”

“Thank you,” said Mrs. Forrester, with grand courtesy, and towering high above the little woman, “I wasn’t looking for him.”

Mrs. Trevor coloured, and moved on a few steps towards the handsome grand piano, near which Enid’s violin master was standing, disconsolately surveying the sleeves of his coat.

“Mr. Humbert,” she said gently, looking at his white face and the deep purple marks beneath his eyes, and wondering what had been making him look so ill during the last fortnight or so, “I have brought you something from your little pupil which—”

“What?” said he, interrupting her,—not in the old excited way, but with a certain dreamy bitterness,—“for me? No,—nothing’s for me.”

"Well,—it's nothing very much," said Mrs. Trevor, unfastening Enid's mignonette from the bosom of her dress, where she had placed it for safety's sake, "but your little pupil sent you this, because it was so beautiful, and she knew you liked beautiful things,—and she wanted me to tell you that. . ."

"Ah!—it *is* beautiful!" he said, clutching hold of the sweet-scented flowers she handed him, and smiling with delight at them, "and,—are they for me?—my own?—did my little Fairy send them me?"

"Yes,"—said Enid's mother very quietly, for, at that moment, she had glanced up, and had met the spiteful, curious gaze of a large blue eye, which seemed to be twisting and turning the presentation of Enid's little peace-offering,—into something very different.

The hubbub of conversation was rising around; people were recovering breath and spirits, and Mrs. Forrester could not have heard what had passed between the violinist and Mrs. Trevor. But she had evidently been watching with attentive interest; and, unfortunately, Franz Humbert's next words

were spoken during a kind of lull that often ensues, before conversation has quite got into full swing. His voice, also, was a high, tenor one—almost alto, and thus more distinctly heard than most men's voices.

“Then—I *love* these sweet flowers,”—he said, fastening them into his coat with white, long-fingered hands,—“and I shall keep them always, because they are mine,—mine, and given me by . . .”

The conversation rose again, and his voice seemed to drop :

“By my little Fairy, and she . . .”

In his earnestness, he bent his head down close to Mrs. Trevor :

“She loves me,—me, her master, just a little bit, doesn't she, Mrs. Trevor ?”

But Mrs. Trevor made no answer. That eye was still upon him, and its look of curiosity had turned to one of malicious triumph. It seemed to bear such evil intent in its mesmerizing stare, that she only heard Franz Humbert's words—as it were—distantly; while, close to and real, was somebody or something attributing to her some bad purpose,—some evil design.

"Tell me,"—said the violinist again, in faltering tones, laying a trembling hand on Mrs. Trevor's arm,—“Oh!—tell me,—doesn't my little child-fairy love me a bit?—I have no one else to care for me.”

The sadness in the still distant tones, touched Mrs. Trevor's tender heart.

“Yes,—Enid loves you, Mr. Humbert,” she said gently, breaking from the spell of her hostess's eye, and feeling as if she were casting off something horribly heavy and evil, as she did so.

“Mr. Humbert,—we should be so delighted if you would give us some of your wonderful music,”—said a voice, close at his side; and starting from his happy dream as he gazed at his flowers, the violinist looked up and found Mrs. Forrester smiling and bewitching him with her imperial beauty.

The double room, large as it was, was getting very full; and voices were no longer shy or afraid of being heard.

“Will they be quiet?”—asked he unceremoniously, frowning angrily at the people around him.

“If they know *you're* going to play,

there'll be silence immediately," said Mrs. Forrester in a low voice.

But aloud she said :

" *In my* house, when there's music—people *always* listen to it. *I* never allow talking while playing or singing is going on,—it is such bad form."

Her voice had its old high, dictatorial pitch about it; she had forgotten to keep it to its lowered tone: consequently, what she said was distinctly heard, even by those most engrossed in conversation.

" I'll bring him in and play, if you want me to,"—complained the violinist ungraciously,—“ but the room's much too full for sound. And,—who's going to— ”

In through the open window, near where Franz Humbert was standing, came the great booming laugh of Mr. Forrester.

" I've persuaded them to come in, at last," —his hearty voice was saying,—“ and we've rescued cushions and antimacassars and things inside the tents, that would have been soaked through and spoiled, if we had left them out there. Here,—Miss Sinclair —do let me relieve you of some of your

wraps,—and you, Mrs. Clemens—and you, Miss Hale,—and you,—I'll take them all round to the front door, while you go in. See,—ha ha!—I'm the beast of burden!"

There was a titter of laughter from within, not only at the host's words, but at the comic figure he cut, laden with the rescued treasures.

Mrs. Forrester turned her back upon the last instalment of ladies, that her husband had brought in. She felt literally ashamed of John carrying, and letting some of her guests carry, the things that should have been left for the footmen to do. Really, his stupidity was quite unbearable! And to come, making such a noise too,—of course it was setting all the people's tongues off, just when she wished for silence!

With a haughty gesture of her head, she turned to one side again, thinking Franz was still close by. But,—he was gone. The eagle sharpness of her eye sought to see where he was; and, in a moment, discovered him only a yard or two off, talking to Miss Sinclair. She supposed he was asking her to accompany him.

But, Mrs. Forrester did not intend that this should be.

"Miss Hale,"—she said sweetly and persuasively, stretching across several people to a lady who had come in just a few moments before Claire had,—"Mr. Humbert would be so glad if you would accompany him. You are such a good musician,—he will find it quite a treat playing with you."

At this same moment, the violinist was saying to Claire :

"*Do* play for me,—it is nothing,—only to bring back the old dream. Why do you say 'no,' when I ask you,—you never used to."

This was the first time they had met, since that night when the violinist had lifted the veil of his genius to disclose the heart of a man. They had seen each other in their adjoining gardens, but, by mutual consent, they had avoided meeting. Now,—they had been brought face to face, and Franz,—unable to resist the passion of feeling that filled him, at the sight of the fair dream, that he had hoped might be real,—was standing, trembling with excitement, begging Claire to renew the old habit, and accompany him.

But, she was firm.

"No, Mr. Humbert,"—she said,—“I want this time to listen to you,—and, there are many ladies here who accompany much better than I do.”

“Then, I shan't play,”—he said, in the tone of a spoilt child, not allowed to have its own way,—“I shall go home.”

And he turned towards the door to go.

Mrs. Forrester saw the angry flash of his eyes on Claire, and his movement in the direction of the door; but, just at this moment, some of the guests were pressing around her,—they had a question to ask, which had already gone the round of the room two or three times, but, until now, had been guardedly kept out of her hearing. So, she was delayed in her pursuit of him.

“Where are you going, Mr. Humbert?”—asked Mrs. Trevor, as he passed her on his way to the door.

His face was flushed, and the great lids of his eyes heavily lowered.

“I am going home,” he said sulkily.

“What?—not going to play?” she said, with surprise.

"No," he answered shortly, trying to pass on.

"Oh! how disappointed Enid will be to hear, when I go back, that you havn't played,"—said Mrs. Trevor, seeing something was wrong,—“I know she has been thinking all this afternoon, about what you would be playing.”

“Has she?” cried he, with alacrity, “does she mind?—does she care?” then, suddenly remembering his flower, and looking tenderly down at it,—“she gave me this;—I'll play if . . . if she likes. Would she d'you think?”

Mrs. Trevor smiled.

“Yes,” she said.

And the violinist, with a light of pleasure in his changeable eyes, passed on out of the room,—not to go home, but to fetch his violin.

Mrs. Trevor looked round in search of Claire. The girl would be feeling strange and lost among so many people, she thought. Her brother didn't seem to be with her. Perhaps, however, he was going to manage to come in late, in the same way as her husband was intending doing.

A buzz of conversation was going on around her; which seemed to rise and fall, with a certain suppressed excitement. She caught a few words here and there.

"Yes, she has asked him."

"How do you know?"

"Mrs. Border put the question pointedly to her and . . ."

"What did she say?"

"Said that it wasn't *her* Christian duty, to bear any man a grudge, and that . . ."

"Oh! yes,—of course she said that, but what besides?"

"That the Rector of *her* Parish received an invitation."

"Well, what next? Did he accept it?"

"I don't know,—I couldn't catch any more,—Mrs. Border was smiling and bridling away, while . . ."

"They're talking of Mr. Liddon," thought Mrs. Trevor to herself, glancing towards the door. She also felt some curiosity to know, whether the new Rector would make his appearance.

"Where's Mr. Humbert?" asked Mrs. Forrester, from the other end of the room,

"he has promised to play, and Miss Hale is going to accompany him. I must beg that we all show our appreciation of their kindness, by being silent."

Franz Humbert's yellow head appeared in the door-way.

"I don't want any one to accompany me," he said doggedly,—"I am going to play by myself."

And, in silence, he made his way to the piano,—struck his notes,—and began tuning his violin, entirely ignoring the fact that Mrs. Forrester was expostulating with him.

The tuning did not take long. He laid his instrument down for one moment,—ran his long fingers through his hair,—bent his head to smell his mignonette,—and then, looked up fiercely at the room full of people.

The irrepressible talk had begun again.

"I shan't play unless you are all quiet," he said, folding his arms, to show that he meant what he said.

Mrs. Forrester's guests looked at him in surprise. Why should they be quiet?

However,—the surprise caused silence.

“Now, I'll begin,” he said smiling, and taking up his instrument with loving care.

“He's mad, as *you* were only telling me, the other day,” said Mrs. Forrester in a low, pointed voice to Mrs. Trevor,—having quietly glided towards her,—“but, I agree with you, in thinking, that he is both handsome and—fascinating.”

Then, with a ripple of laughter, she passed on.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE NEW RECTOR.

FOR the first few moments after Franz Humbert began his music, which, rather contrary to Claire's expectations, opened with a soft, subdued melody,—there was absolute and complete silence in the room.

The violinist was not well known in Abbeyslea, though he had been a resident in the Parish for, now, rather over three years. People knew him by sight, talked of him as a curiosity, pitied him for not being like themselves, and wondered why—if he were musical—he didn't just write music and publish it. But, further than this, they could not own themselves interested; though, nominally, they considered themselves fairly musical people. But then,—also,—they claimed being fairly artistic, fairly literary, and fairly religious; they hadn't time for being “excessive” in any-

thing. Occasionally, when particularly musical friends or relatives were staying with certain of them,—they would warm up towards the solitary violinist, and ask him and his violin in for a musical evening. But, Franz Humbert was seldom happy at these social gatherings; something usually upset him just before he began, so that his music would be stormy and complaining, and wholly discordant to any but the most delicately susceptive ears. Thus, he shocked rather than pleased; and came away after, miserably sensible, that both he and his violin had proved failures.

This time, however,—in the midst of Mrs. Forrester's large assemblage of friends,—he began well. He was thinking of his sweet-scented mignonette,—he was dreaming of his little child-pupil, who, alone, out of the whole wide world, he thought, loved him and cared what he did, or did not do. He seemed to have forgotten the presence of the girl, whom he had asked to love him, and who had told him to go back to his dreams and his music, because that was what his life was now and always to be made up of. And

she,—though he did not know it—was glad that he was doing himself justice, that he was showing forth some of the beauty of his genius, and not—as ever—struggling with it. So, she drew back further, and, with her large eyes fixed upon him, listened with rapt attention, trying to understand what were his thoughts as he played.

Many eyes were turned upon him with growing wonder, as, with the most exquisite delicacy of touch and expression, the melody rose and fell.

Some of the listeners, however,—not content with wondering and showing their surprise and pleasure by the expression of their faces—could not resist leaning forward and whispering to each other. They did not *feel* the value of each note, of each minute tremor of the speaking instrument; and thus, the dead silence, upon which, at first, the charmed notes had beautifully dropped, became broken.

The violinist's face clouded. He could hear close around him the sss of the whispers, drowning and mocking his soft diminuendoes.

“He really doesn't play so badly,” one was condescendingly remarking.

“He’s rather good-looking side-face,”—added another irrelevantly, and totally disregarding his close proximity.

“A pity he does not always play like this,—it’s so nice,”—approved a third,—“I wonder whether he’s composing this piece himself.”

“What funny attitudes, he stands in,” expressed the admirer of his side face again, intent upon everything connected with him, *except* his music,—“he’d look much better though if he kept quite still,—and didn’t nearly close his eyes sometimes.”

“How dirty his violin is, he ought to re-varnish it and . . .”

Crash,—crash !

But, in the midst of the crashes, came the more excited whispers of—

“Look ! he’s come.”

Discord might follow discord, or sweetest melody give place to sweetest melody, but, it would have no effect. The interest in the music was gone. The violinist’s powers were powerless ; and the violin’s beauty of tone no longer attracting. Mrs. Forrester’s guests had now another far greater interest and excitement to occupy their

eyes and their minds. Franz Humbert was nowhere, and nobody. He might just as well not have been there, for aught anyone now cared. And his music? People *aren't musical*, when there is anyone new and strange, to watch and talk about.

In this case, perhaps, it was very natural that all musical appreciation should fly to the winds; for, the greater number of Mrs. Forrester's guests had been looking forward to this "At Home" with a peculiar and special interest, and now,—the central object of that interest had appeared. Thus, all else came as nothing to it.

The new Rector had come.

Standing by the outside door of the largest of the double rooms, the people, from within, could just see his slight figure and strong, dark face. Close by him, making him look shorter and shabbier, stood a tall, magnificent footman, waiting to announce his name. The footman's face expressed nothing, because a footman's face has to wear a mask; but, for all that, he was thinking as he surveyed the Rector from his superior height, that if *he* had been a parson, he would have worn a

new coat when he came amongst a lot of ladies and gentlemen, and put a nice, curling wig on the top of his thin hair, and made his face worth looking at by growing a fine, long moustache, something after the cut of his own. For, the footman's taste was a nice, cultivated one.

The hostess, with her quick eye, had caught sight of the Rector, even before the whisper and the turn of all eyes towards him. Perhaps, she had heard his voice in the hall: anyway,—the moment he was within sight, she saw him; and over her beautiful, blonde face there had flashed suddenly a look of malice. It was but momentary, and was replaced by the calm, dignified composure, which was to carry her through the double part she had to play in welcoming this man to her house, who she knew, on the first opportunity, she would take pleasure in injuring. For, Mrs. Forrester was one of those Christians who *never* forgive. Yet, she meant to treat Mr. Liddon affably, to express the pleasure she felt in seeing him, to take the trouble to introduce him to those parishioners whose

acquaintance he had not yet had time to make, and to show him the munificence of her hospitality. It was all, in her mind's eye, to *appear* as if she forgave, and returned good for evil ; and, so far—satisfactory.

—There had been an almost breathless silence, after Mrs. Forrester's guests had become aware of their Rector's presence amongst them.

The cloud again passed from Franz Humbert's face, and, with a return to the sweetness of his first refrain, he brought his melody to a soft and peaceful close. The last note died away,—not like a cry, plaintive, bemoaning,—but like a whispered message of joy and rest.

“ Ah ! my brother !”—murmured he to his instrument, entirely unconscious of where he was, or who was about him—“ we are happy together again.”

“ The Reverend Ambrose Liddon,”—announced the footman, announcing the ‘Reverend’ very reverently, but bringing out the surname with a short, sharp jerk.

“ I am most delighted to see you,” said Mrs. Forrester, not gushingly, but with a

sort of soft, forgiving intonation in her lowered voice, as she advanced towards him.

“Are you?” said he, giving her a quick glance from his dark eye, and bending his head with courtesy as he took her proffered hand,—“I was afraid the pleasure would only be on my side.”

Whether he spoke satirically or not, she could not tell. But certain it was, he was not the man to dabble in a society’s polished lie.

His voice was sweet, and the tender, expressive mouth was smiling as he spoke. Yet, Mrs. Forrester felt she must feel her way. Every word he uttered would probably be heard, and every sentiment she expressed, be carefully thought of and remembered afterwards.

But, he was the first to speak again.

“You have a genius in your midst, Mrs. Forrester,” he said, looking over in the direction of the violinist,—“I wish I had been here from the beginning,—for, it is only once now and again in one’s life-time, that one hears music such as that. If I may,—I should like to have a few words with him.”

"I'll introduce you," Mrs. Forrester answered graciously.

"No need," said he, in his peculiarly melodious voice, smiling and stepping forward as he spoke,—"fellow-men disown their fellowship, if they have to wait for introductions."

And he passed on in the direction of Franz Humbert.

Then, the tongues around him were loosened! Every scrap and bit of him was commented upon. Every variety of opinion upon his personal appearance, and personal anything that was the slightest known,—was passed from tongue to tongue, from ear to ear. He was the newcomer,—the lion of the day; *the one* to be picked to pieces,—to be effigied,—to be caricatured,—to be anamorphosed. For, it was just as likely as not, that the greater number of those who were inspecting and dissecting, saw, what they saw, wrongly, and knew, what they knew, incorrectly. But—that was not to the point.

There were two people, however, amongst Mrs. Forrester's guests, who did not care to

join in the general gossip. The one,—Mrs. Trevor—seldom hastily expressed her opinions, because she liked to take a rational time in forming them ; and, also, she did not agree in joining in these processes of vivisection. The other,—Claire Sinclair—was not a girl who had the least inclination to turn to her girl friends or her masculine acquaintances, and say,—as those around her were :

“ What a strange face, he’s got ! ”

“ His mouth’s too wide.”

“ Pity his eyes aren’t larger.”

“ It’s a splendid face, if only he were taller to carry it off.”

“ I wonder why his hair is so thin on the top.”

“ Do you think it’s natural ? ”

“ I should have thought he could have done something to make it grow,—it makes him look so like a monk.”

“ Perhaps,—he likes looking like a monk.”

“ Never saw a man smile in the way he does.”

“ It’s almost too sweet, considering he can be so fierce.”

Etc., etc.

Then, the remarks would turn to his voice, his manner, his clothes ; the possibility or desirability of his marrying ;—his sermons, his style of preaching, his way of walking ; the history of the ring on his finger ; where he had come from, his birth, his pedigree, how old he was ; the nature of his Church views, the right or wrong he had taken in rebuking Mrs. Forrester ; what he would do now,—what he would do next. In fact, everything connected with him, and everything that was supposed to be connected with him, was splendidly and interestingly discussed ; and, was still being discussed when Mrs. Forrester gave the sign for the move into the tea room.

She had managed to get near her notorious guest again,—with a purpose. She meant him to conduct her, before all her friends, across the hall into the room where her sumptuous tea, with its abundant choice of fruit and delicacies, would be outspread. She meant her friends all to see and comment upon this act of hers. She meant the new Rector to feel small and remorseful, when he found how great was her Christian charity of feeling. And she meant—when he felt this

—that he should apologize for the way he had treated her, and humbly sue for her forgiveness for the words he had once spoken against her. *This* is what Mrs. Forrester intended should come to pass.

“Mr. Liddon, we are making a move into the next room,”—she said, with her most queenly graciousness of manner,—“all agree that it will be nice for the new Rector and the hostess to lead the way.”

And she laid her hand in his arm.

With an inclination of his head,—a courteous movement which all noticed he made whenever he was addressing ladies—he turned from Mrs. Border, to whom he had been speaking, and looked up at Mrs. Forrester. She stood taller than he did, and had a greater amount of ‘presence’ on than usual.

“Is it peace between us?”—he said, in a low tone,—not willing that those around should hear.

“I do not understand you,”—she said, haughtily, but flushing as she spoke, for she understood perfectly well to what he was referring.

“Yes, you do,”—he said, the stern lines

gathering round his mouth, while his eyes fixed themselves steadily on her face,—“if you bear me any ill-will for having done my duty, in reprimanding you for your conduct in the House of God,—then it would be hypocrisy for you to appear to be on perfectly friendly terms with me,—when you are not. For, you still bear me a grudge, though you wish to hide it in the presence of your friends. Have you —”

“I thought I had invited a *gentleman* to my house,”—Mrs. Forrester said, stung out of her usual composure, and drawing her hand, as if poisoned by it, from his arm;—then, added distantly, unwilling to give up her designed purpose—“Yet in my own house, and in the presence of my own friends,—notwithstanding the grudge I now bear you, and always shall,—I desire to be conducted by you into the next room.”

His face paled.

“And I, Mrs. Forrester,” he said, firmly, —“in the presence of God, cannot join with you in playing a double part.”

The next moment, she had laid her arm in Colonel Border's; and, in a stately manner,

was heard chaffing him for being so backward in volunteering to escort her.

Many of her guests wondered why it was the new Rector had not accepted that honour; but, as the dialogue between him and Mrs. Forrester had been carried on in an undertone, they could not guess what had passed between them. It furnished a little more matter for supposition and comment, and thus was edifying in its way, but—that was all. The unanimous conclusion was, that Mr. Liddon had peculiar views, outside his Church ones; one of which must have been, that he wished to stay in the background on certain occasions, when—as Rector,—he was looked to, to take a prominent position.

The room began to thin. All the elder of the guests had followed Mrs. Forrester into the large dining-room, across the other side of the spacious hall.

The rain was still coming down in torrents; the sky was dark, and the air warm and heavy.

The front door stood open,—no longer guarded; for, the guests had all arrived. Even Mr. Trevor and a few other men, late

from their business, had hastened up in hansoms, and had had their names duly announced, in proper style. The footmen had disappeared into the tea-room. There, the sea of talk could be heard rising higher and higher, as it often does when people are pleasantly engaged.

No one was standing in the hall ; those, who were not in the tea-room, were still in the drawing-room. In the latter, Mr. Forrester was doing his host's part as best he knew how. He did it well. Everyone felt free and at their ease, when he was near. His geniality, homeliness, and kindness of heart were infecting. People laughed naturally and talked naturally, when he was by ;—they seemed to forget their society manners and their society talk, when they heard the great bass heartiness of his voice and laugh. Everyone was fond of him ; and never found him the great unmannerly bear, that his highly-cultivated and hardly-to-be-pleased wife, did.

The Reverend Liddon had taken several ladies into the crowded tea-room. He had seen the glitter of the shining silver ; he had touched the papery thinness of the rare old

china ; he had smelt the luscious fruit, heaped with lavish abundance upon the delicate dishes. He had heard people express their surprise at its wealth and beauty, knowing that fruit this year was small and scarce, owing to the dryness of the summer weather. In the midst of this minor talk, he had become aware that *he* was the subject of universal comment ; he had heard loud whispers upon what he was doing,—what he was saying—what he was appearing. He had heard some of the giddy, flippant girls suggesting, amongst themselves, to nickname him “Brother Ambrose,” because he was so like a monk, and had a face that was “perfectly divine,” when he smiled ; he had heard the shabbiness of his coat remarked on,—the beauty of his hands,—the mellowness of his voice. And as the talk rose louder, and the room grew hotter, and the ladies’ rich dresses passed round and by him, and he heard soft society lies being recklessly uttered,—it all rose up before him as a pernicious thing, and —without a word—he left the room, stifled and choked by what was around and within him.

He walked to the open front door, with a mist before his eyes and a din of talk, talk, in his ears.

“Oh!—to get away from this,”—he said to himself, “for just one breath of free air. Far rather would I go as priest of God amongst the lowest, most desolate of districts, than I would—amongst all this prosperity and wealth. God has given these of this world’s goods, yet—which of them looks up to Him, and acknowledges Him as the Giver? Which of them does not hold as though it were his own—thinking not that it is only *lent*? And which of them, I wonder, —aye, I wonder, thinks aught of those fellow-men and women, living scarce two miles off from their very doors, in the heart of that great city, where hardly they find bread wherewith to nourish themselves from day to day?”

It was sunset time and, though the rain was still coming down in torrents,—towards the West, the clouds had broken, and a stormy, lurid glow lit up the Heavens. The red light seemed to bear down straight upon the City of O—; which, in the distance,

from Mrs. Forrester's house, was plainly visible. It suffused the tall chimneys and the ugly rows of small houses, and the Church spires and the dirty blackened roofs, with its bright light. Beyond,—was growing darkness, and the mist of rain; before,—trees, meadow-land, well-built houses, crawling river,—but, they were all in shade; it was the city, the city only, that stood out as if all on fire with the sunset glow. It presented a strange appearance,—weird and grand; such as an artist would have revelled in.

The Rector folded his hands before him, and glanced away from the red city, up into the dark Heavens.

“ Ah ! God ! ”—he muttered, a cold sweat rising to his pale brow,—for, he was a man of strong passions,—“ why hast Thou given me work I cannot do?—I would tell these wealthy, contented, self-loving, and self-worshipping men and women, of the great Life they know so little of, of the mysterious God they persistently ignore, but—but I *dare not*, O God,—I *dare not*,—I *cannot* do the work that Thou hast put before me.”

And, strong, brave man as he was, he

shuddered as he pictured himself, with some of Abbeyslea's most prosperous standing close around, looking,—wondering,—mocking at him, and at what he was saying.

“Take me away from a work, I cannot do,”—he prayed, his mouth trembling, his eyes straining up into the growing darkness,—“I have not strength, I have not power,—I am but as a worm upon the earth,—of no account,—of no use, unprofitable—Cast me away,—Give this work to a man holier and more God-like than me.”

Louder and louder grew the sound of the voices within; smaller and smaller grew the rift in the skies. The light on the city faded away, till nothing was left of it except one bright streak, which lit up vividly the high spire of the largest Church in O—. It rested there several moments, and, then, reluctantly died away. As it died, the Rector's pale face flushed, and his eyes grew steady with a sudden power.

“It is a sign,”—he said, turning to re-enter the house. “The cup is bitter, yet will I drink it. In His Strength, I am surely—strong enough.”

CHAPTER XXII.

A PURPOSE IN LIFE.

“ If he is a gentleman, he certainly is one without any manners.”

This is what Mrs. Forrester was saying, with a decided emphasis upon the “if,” as the Rector of Abbeyslea Parish re-entered the now brilliantly-lighted tea room.

He heard the words, and compressed his lips. He was a sensitive man, not yet inured to what his work and mission would subject him. Once he had been proud of his good birth; once he had been hot and fierce-tempered, when insult or scorn were thrown in his face. But now the pride was *rising* to humility, and the quick wrath to tenderness. But notwithstanding this, the words, expressions and views of his fellow men, could still pierce and wound.

“ We were wondering whether you had left us altogether, Mr. Liddon,”—murmured Mrs.

Border, smiling pleasantly, and anxious to cover up the all too evident confusion that was shown at his reappearance, just at the utterance of Mrs. Forrester's unlucky remark.

"No,—I did not mean to leave so unceremoniously,"—he said, not moving further, but remaining standing near the open door, a little apart from Mrs. Forrester's other guests,—“I left the room to gain strength and knowledge, for—I'm a very weak and cowardly man.”

A murmur of dissent to this avowal, ran through the room. Cowardly,—this earnest, bold, God-fearing man? Did he know himself, and the effect he was already beginning to make on his parishioners, that he should say that?

“You may not think it, perhaps,”—he continued, looking down as he spoke,—“but it is quite true. Every man who does not go forward and do his duty, and do it well—as God would have him do it,—is a coward. And, just now, when I was in here, I was one. I felt I would do anything, aye—and go anywhere,—if I might only escape from doing what I should do.”

He paused.

No one spoke. Most of Mrs. Forrester's guests,—though they stared back in surprise at him, for being guilty of hesitating to do his duty,—felt sundry twinges as to whether, if judged according to his high standard, they did not *sometimes* come within the pale of being termed what he had termed himself. Mrs. Forrester, herself, however, possessed a conscience that had ceased to trouble her. Her own will and her own ideas were her gods. Mr. Liddon had ushered in a subject, upon which she always had a great deal to say. But, as yet, her dignity counselled her to remain silent; while her eyes gazed upon the Rector with a cold, impatient stare.

There is nothing so paralyzing as the stare of society wonder, or the silence of society self-satisfaction. The Reverend Liddon felt his brain throbbing, and his heart bursting; but—his lips were dry. Ready speech seemed to refuse to come.

But, as every word bears fruit, so, in the moment of his weakness,—words, he had spoken but a short while agone,—bore theirs.

“Duty?—What is duty?”—cried Franz Humbert scornfully, darting forward and, with a short laugh, placing himself in front of the silent Rector.

Not an hour ago, this man had spoken to him in a way and with a kindness, that no other man—not even his friend, Sinclair—had ever spoken to him; and now, he had said words that were as folly to his ears. What did he mean by them?

“My friend,—do you know what duty is?” said Ambrose Liddon.

“No,” said the violinist lightly, “I don’t even know what you mean by the word. I only live for myself and my violin,—even, better things that I once thought real, are not. For, there’s no such thing as love, and there’s no such thing as hope;—only in dreams there is happiness, and only in sleep there comes rest.”

The light tone had changed to one of bitterness: the eyes were hungrily scanning the dark, strong face of the man before him.

Mrs. Forrester’s guests shuddered; and those, who were near the inquiring dreamer, drew back. It might harm them to be in

close contact with him. The hem of their garments might become contractors for evil, by touching the leather of his shoe !

“ Ah ! ” said the priest of God, breathing hard, as if in pain, “ you live for yourself—you live for your art ? And those around you, I see, are drawing back in righteous horror at your words. Yet,”—turning from the violinist, and, in one sweeping glance, seeming to see beneath the surface of each one in the room,—“ *what do you all live for ?* ”

Silence.

Gradually all the eyes were lowered, beneath the refining fire of his gaze. All eyes, except one pair, and those remained coldly, meaninglessly, fixed upon him. Mrs. Forrester had made up her mind, that nothing should induce her to betray that her will was in subjection to his, or that what he said could make any difference to her. Once she had given way and shown herself beaten :—this should never happen a second time.

“ What do you all live for ? ” he asked again, raising his voice.

Still there was silence. The few men who were in the room, looked out at the dark

windows, or at the pictures on the walls,—anywhere, except at the speaker, or at each other. They felt decidedly uncomfortable, and wished they hadn't come to this affair ; that their business had kept them prisoners. They hated awkward questions being put, even by a straightforward, genuine kind of man, like their new Rector had shewn himself to be. It was far easier and more pleasantly digestible, to go on in the same groove, and not be made to think about things they meant to consider when they were ill, and perhaps going to die. Time enough to think what they were living for, then.

“I will tell you what the greater number of you live for,” said the Reverend Liddon, knitting his straight, black brows, and his voice ringing not so much with scorn as with sadness. “You live for yourselves,—you live for the money you have to get,—you live for your pride, your tastes, your desires, your gains. Or—you step higher,—you live for those you love,—for your wives, your children, your relations, your dearest friends. You live to please them, to comfort them ;—

you strive, that they may profit,—you labour, that they may reap the benefit,—and you suffer perhaps, that you may save them from suffering. And this *is* a high and laudable motive for living, and *is* able—in its way,—to make this present life worth living. *But*, it is not enough. *This* does not lift you above the animals, or make you as gods and kings upon the earth. *This* does not make you worthy of the purpose for which you were created.”

Franz Humbert laughed,—a sharp, unnatural laugh.

“ What should we live for, then ? ” he asked, in the tone that Pilate must have used, when he said, “ What is truth ? ” and waited not for an answer.

“ We should live for the Honour and Glory of God,” replied the new Rector of Abbeyslea, bowing his head as he spoke, with reverence, at the high object of man’s life.

“ For the Honour and Glory of God ? ” murmured the violinist, shaking his head, and sadly moving back, away from the Rector, “ I don’t know what you mean.”

“ No wonder,” said the man of God

bitterly, a shadow dark as night passing over his face. “ You are not the only one here, who would be forced to make that same confession. How can you know God, if you are ashamed to own Him as your God ? How can you live for Him, Whose Name you are afraid to mention, for fear of mockery ? How can you fulfil His great Purpose, when you ignore that Purpose ? How can you be gods, God-like,—when you turn your heads and harden your hearts from the Words, and the Ways of the one high God ? It is *impossible*,—‘ you *cannot* serve God and Mammon.’ You *cannot* bow down before His Will and live for His Honour and Glory, when your own wills are your gods, and your own honour and glory the objects of your lives. Ah !—why not declare yourselves heathen at once,—for, the religion you call your Christian religion is but a civilized heathen religion, under whose shelter you rest content, and for whose security you recklessly barter your souls. Is it worth your whiles, think you, to keep up this mock of a religion, that you hold so tight ? ”

He paused,—his chest heaving, his heart burning.

All the eyes that, at first, had been lowered, were raised and fixed upon him. The greater number of them expressed amazement at the monstrosity of his plain accusations. Some few were filled with tears ; for the truth of what he said, was driving itself deep into their hearts.

But no one spoke, though the Rector waited for an answer to his question.

Was it likely that anyone there present, would hold himself dissatisfied with the hollow spectre of a religion, with which he lived content ? There are degrees of valour ; but that which makes a man or woman own himself in the wrong before his fellows,—is valour in its superlative degree. Few men or women possess this.

“Once more I will speak, then,” said the new Rector, in tones of growing sternness. “If you do not live for the Honour and Glory of God,—which is the highest aim of man’s existence,—do you even seek to live for the next highest object ? Do you live for your fellow men and women,—for the good of humanity in general,—for the good of the world in which you are placed ? Do you, by

your lives, raise the lives of those around you? Do you, by your words and actions, shew that your sympathies are not narrowed to the interest of the few, when—before you—lies the welfare of the many? Ah!—let me give you the impression received this very afternoon, that I have spent in your midst. What have I heard,—what have I seen? There have been lies on your tongues, —nice, sweet-flavoured, pleasantly-uttered, polished lies. There have been back-bitings, slanders, taking away of characters, evil communications,—among you. There have been looks of sweetness and words of gall, or —bitterest irony, as it seems—looks of gall and words of sweetness. What,—I say, are you better than those ignorant poor, whom you pity, or—oftenest condemn? What nobler are you, than they,—aye—what different are you to them, except . . . *except* for your culture, your refinement, your ability for glossing evil over with a show of good? Listen, . . . I . . .”

He stopped abruptly.

His last few words, he could see by

the faces before him, were giving more offence than all else, that he had said before. But a sudden idea had struck him, and, for a moment, he paused to ponder over its feasibility. He had advanced boldly one step,—could he take another? It was scarcely now a question of will or of fortitude; it was, rather, whether the power within him, would be still further lent.

He seemed to waver; then,—as a light,—a smile broke over his face.

“Some of you have never seen, the homes of the most destitute of your *fellow-creatures*,” he said gently, moving towards Mrs. Forrester as he spoke, “yet,—have these men and women been created by the same God, for the same purpose, and for the same end,—as you have. There is a difference of outward circumstances only,—the difference of birth, education and possession; but, the inward are the same,—for, they have, like you,—body, soul and spirit. Have you any right therefore, to disown your kinship with them,—living, as you all are, in

the power of *one* God, and under the care of *one* Father?"

The sleeve of his coat, was almost touching Mrs. Forrester's handsome dress.

"Mrs. Forrester," he said, "I have an invitation to give *you*; as hostess, I ask you first. The city of O—, lies scarcely two miles off,—I am going to one of the poorest streets in it,—will you accompany me?"

A murmur of surprise at such a suggestion, made at such a time, and in such a place,—ran through the room.

Mrs. Forrester drew up her head with withering scorn.

"I give my money to Charities, supporting Home Missions, Poor Clergy, and Deserving Cases," said she, marking each excellence with dignified care,—I subscribe to a Coal Club, during severe winters;—I patronize Homes for Orphans;—I work for Bazaars,—and give many liberal donations;—*that* is enough. Ladies, in my position, are not called upon to do more."

The Pharisee's confession of old, was surely equalled by Mrs. Forrester's.

The Rector drew back.

“I am leaving now,” he said quietly, facing Mrs. Forrester’s guests. “Will any of you accompany me?”

He waited for no answer, but slowly made his way to the door. When he reached it, he turned round to see if any were following him. Not a person had moved. For one moment an angry gleam seemed to flash from his eyes, then—with a slight inclination of the head—he left the room.

The hall was lit up bright and glaring; but, he groped about for his hat, as if he were in darkness. He stumbled against the tall footmen, as if he saw not. One of them found his hat, and gave it to him; he murmured something, but it was incoherent.

At the front door, he stumbled up against someone again, and tried to utter an apology. He was, however, cut short in the midst of it.

“I’m coming with you, if I may,” said a high, tenor voice, and as the mist of pain and disappointment cleared from the Rector’s eyes, he saw the yellow hair of the violinist gleaming beneath the lights.

“Come, my brother,” he said simply, laying his hand on the dreamer’s arm.

And, as, together they made their way down the stone steps leading into the drive, two pair of eyes watched them.

For,—there were two others who would have gone. But, Mrs. Trevor’s husband had not wished it; and Claire Sinclair had no brother there, to ask if she might go.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE IDOL SHATTERED.

THE early days in September had come and gone. The long, dry Summer followed by the many dark wet days, had ushered in autumn changes very prematurely. The year seemed getting old before his time, and all his strength and beauty to be passing, without a struggle, into an early grave. The grass lay brown and sodden, not yet recovered from the scorching heat that had not long before, burned to its very roots, and left them dry and sapless. And the trees held their limp leaves just carelessly, with no pride to cling to them until they changed to colour, — russet, red, and golden, — making Mother-Nature glorious with their beauty. They were indifferently content, to let them drop with every freshening breeze; seemingly, not caring to keep or tend their summer covering.

The few flowers that strove to guard their blooms, looked miserable in their struggle ; and, at length, gave up with drooping heads, and scattered washed-out petals. What was the use of striving to look fair and beautiful, and still to be brightening up the fading Earth, when all else—by contrast—mocked at them ? What glory had they, when no sun came to shine on them, to make them blaze and glisten in his light ? What praise had they for their endeavours, when their master-man cared not, in gloom and rain, to come round and revel in their beauty ?

Yet, sometimes,—after long, dragging days of steady rain,—at sunset-time, the sullen clouds would lift ; and, in his sinking power, the sun would bathe the wet Earth in a crimson light. He would touch the swift-rushing river with a blood-red hue ; and all the pools, so colourless before, would stand as crimson mirrors, across which would float dark lines and angry storm-clouds. Then,—all Nature, bent and moist and dying as she was, would look up and once again appear beautiful, in that radiant and lingering caress.

It was during this early September time,

when Summer was apparently merging into Winter, without much thought of Autumn coming in between,—that Claire Sinclair became aware of a subtle change, that was passing over her. She felt it creeping in, and, in some mysterious way, leavening her thoughts and all her views of life. Sometimes, she would glance black, not far—not to that time before she came to join Marc in his home, but much nearer, only a few weeks ago—and wish to try and feel how she had felt then. To try,—not because she wanted, but just for the sake of speculation—to undo and unmake herself, back to that time. To try and think, as she had thought then; to dream and soliloquize, as she had then been content to do. To try and recognise herself now, as the Claire Sinclair that she had then been. But, she could not; what she was now, and what she was then,—were strangers:—they were two different people!

Sometimes, a change comes about almost unconsciously, and quite inexplicably. Sometimes, a change is so gradual, that a year, or years, may pass, and all the while a perplexing something be going on within, and yet no

obvious knowledge of, or reason for it, be known. But, this was not the case with Claire. She could mark the hour, that had keenly separated her former self from her present self ; and she could, every conscious moment, feel the growing, living power of the cause that was transforming her. It was, to her, ever present ; cropping up and threading its way into everything, opening her eyes, enlarging her mind, stirring her heart, and quickening her soul. She felt and knew it was being the means, of expanding her whole nature, into something higher,—better,—nobler,—than she had ever dreamt it could be.

This change dated back to the afternoon of Mrs. Forrester's 'At Home.' The cause of it was that which, for days after, had been upon everyone's tongues, namely,—the words then spoken by the new Rector of Abbeyslea. Some regarded those words in this light, some—in that ; some understood them in one way, some—in another. Some had bad memories and exaggerating propensities, and—before many days had gone by—were spreading reports about them, and about

their meaning, before which *Truth* must have staggered. It was so absolutely incredible, how the first two simple rules of arithmetic,—addition and subtraction,—could be brought in, in such compound and complicated force. It was sad, too, very,—because if the hearers of those words had just let them alone, and allowed them to remain and work into their hearts,—they would have borne fruit ; and the fruit would have been good fruit. Some few, amongst the many, did allow this to take place ; but, it was very few.

Claire had returned to her brother's home that night, with the germs of a new idea and a new object in life, awakening within her. Each word, that the Reverend Liddon had uttered, seemed to ring again and again in her ears ; and each strong, high thought to sink down deep into her heart, and show her capacities and desires lying there, of which she had had no knowledge. Her religious feeling, which up till now had been of a most nominal and outward kind, seemed suddenly to be lit as with a flame ; and to appear as a living power from out of the dark enclosure,

in which it had been crushed and smothered. She seemed to dimly recognise that life was no life, if not absorbed in a Higher Life ; and that an object in life which only included the love for and devotion to, one brother,—was an object fairly worthy in its narrow way, but so limited and small beside what it might be, that she felt amazed at herself, because this had never until now, with any force,—dawned upon her.

“ To live for the Honour and the Glory of God,” — ah ! — how the words seemed to breathe and live in her ; how they seemed to echo through her dreams, and, waking, find them forming on her lips. She could not understand them in their full, perfect, and complete sense ; neither, as yet, did she know how they could leaven and control her every thought, word and action. How that, in their power, each rising, evil thought would sink in shame, and every tempting, evil word would soften into gentleness, and every uncharitable deed be rooted out in love. But still she could see, what she had not seen before, that—each individual life, if lived as the God of Life intended that it should, must

not be an aimless, petty existence, subjected and controlled by a human will, and for a human object. She could feel, though only gropingly, that the vast majority of mankind,—her brother and herself included—were cut off and sharply severed, from the highest capacities and powers God had given them in their natures. That man only fulfils a small and very minor part of his existence, if he stoops to worship man and not God ; that he employs only a small half of what has been granted him, if he ignores the spiritual and immaterial element, that lives within him.

As these thoughts grew and, together with them, came longings and desires to know more, to feel more, and to be capable of more,—Claire saw the darling idol, to which she had clung ever since her earliest childhood, fall. Her brother became to her, no longer perfect. His standard of right, was not the highest or best standard of right. His ideas and opinions were not the greatest, or most correct. His words were not the most right words, or his deeds the noblest deeds,—as they had been heretofore. She

loved him now, as much as she had loved him before ; but not in the same way. He was no longer the god of her life ; the one brave, perfect man, in whose love and care she was happy, and in whose wisdom and nobility, she placed her trust. For, with the awakening of the highest part of Claire's nature, the idol of her whole life—up till then—was shattered. Her brother could never again be to her, what he had once been. Not that he changed, not that he became any more imperfect, or any less worthy ; but that her ideas and views were lifted, and she could not again be content with what had once satisfied her.

It was with many a struggle and tear, that she recognised that this was one of the results, of the change that was passing over her. At first, she had fought hard and often against it. She would place her fallen idol up again, on the pedestal upon which he used to stand ; but, again and again, would he fall, and each time her efforts to replace him, would grow weaker and more despairing. At length, she gave it up as fruitless. He would ever be to her very dear,

very lovable, very precious; but, perfect—never.

As soon as this became quite clear to her, she made up her mind that she must tell Marc. She could not, for a moment longer, let him think that he was all to her that he used to be. It was quite impossible for her straightforward and sincere nature, to attempt to appear in the least way what she was not. She couldn't pretend. She couldn't act. She couldn't play the double part, of *seeming* to think of him in the same light as she used to; or *seeming* to love him in the blind, infatuated way that she had all her life done, up till then. Hard as it was, it would have been harder for her to have hidden anything from him; or allowed him to think she was clinging to him and idolizing him, as she once had.

And yet, when she came to the point, what had she to say? Thoughts and feelings, that were lucid enough to herself, looked quite foolish and foundationless when expressed in words. Things that she could feel deeply, seemed nothing at all when subjected to the limits of utterance. However,

stumble along as she might, and even, perhaps, fail to make her meaning understood, she was still too anxious to open up her heart to him, as she had always done, to think of postponing what was not exactly easy or agreeable.

She began the confession, she meant to make, by a question a little removed from the real subject she had at heart.

“Marc,” she began, one evening, as they were sitting together,—“are you,—what people call—*satisfied* with life in general?”

The remark came so quaintly and unnaturally from her lips, that he smiled before he answered; and then, instead of answering, asked her another question.

“Who’s been putting you up to asking such philosophical enigmas, as that?” he said, laying down the paper he wasn’t reading, and looking in an amused way at her.

“It’s my own question, Marc, and, I am speaking quite seriously,” she replied, with a slight frown, “and I *do* want you to give me a real answer to it,—though, I daresay you think I don’t understand any of these kind of things.”

In fact, just then, she felt quite sure that Marc regarded her too much in the light of a child; otherwise, he wouldn't always try and put her off, whenever she attempted to attack matters, which went a little below the surface.

Seeing she was in earnest, and more so than usual,—he gave her a monosyllabic reply.

“No,” he said.

This was not encouraging. Why didn't he say more than “no?”

“Marc,—I should like a longer answer than that,” she said slowly, “because,—well, because I have a lot to say afterwards. Only I want to know what you think first, then—that will help me to say what I am going to say. D'you see?”

“Not exactly,” answered he carelessly, “because I don't see that it matters to anyone except themselves, about the answer to that question of yours. If I'm not satisfied with life and never shall be, of course that can only really, fortunately, affect me. I shouldn't like *you* to be biassed by and bothered about those kind of things, and . . .”

“But *why* isn't it all satisfactory to you?”

she interrupted, leaning forward, and taking the paper out of his hands that he had again raised, as if with the intention of reading.

“Why?—Too many reasons to give,”—he said disjointedly, turning his face from her, as he spoke, “Life isn’t worth the trouble of living,—money isn’t worth the labour of gaining,—and love—well, there I’ll stop, Claire,—for since you came, I have tasted again of its sweets, and have been—satisfied.”

“Quite satisfied, Marc?” she asked, getting up from her seat, and going close to him that she might look into his face.

He gave an impatient exclamation, and then looked back at her almost angrily.

“Have I the face of a man, who is perfectly satisfied with anything?” he asked bitterly.

“No,” she said, thinking as she looked down at his handsome gloomy face, of another face, not as handsome, but stronger, more powerful, and yet more peaceful than his. What would have been his answer to her question, she wondered.

“Then, why do you ask me, Claire,” said he, more gently. “Why did you want me to tell you, that even your love does not satisfy me? I didn’t want you to know it, dear, for—when we came to live together, it was on the understanding that life was to begin, then, to be—happy. Why it isn’t perfectly so,—I cannot tell. I think it must be because I am so thoroughly dissatisfied with myself.”

For a moment, she did not speak. Not that his words pained or disappointed her; for, her instinct had long ago told her, that do what she might, lavish what she might upon him,—she could not be *the all* to him that she had thought she could. She could not fill up the void in his nature. Her love and sympathy, however deep and tender, could not satisfy him. But, she was rather sadly turning over in her mind, the all too obvious fact, that there was failure both on his side, as well as upon hers.

“Marc,” she said in a low voice, taking his two hands in hers, and looking down at them, as she spoke, “I think we must have the same kind of feeling, for . . . ”

“What do you mean?” interrupted he harshly.

It was all very well for him—a man—to crave for more and want more, than what was given; but women have softer lives to lead, and less desires—so he thought—to satisfy,—why shouldn’t *they* be content?

His harshness brought her quickly to the point. She determined to tell him straight out, in not such a roundabout way as she had meant to, of the change in her feelings towards him.

“Well, Marc,—I want to tell you *this*,” she said, in a voice very unlike her own, “you know, I have always thought you perfect and noble and everything that you ought to be. You remember, once, I told you, that you were my idol,—that whatever you did or said would be right. But—oh! Marc,—this is all slipping from me now,—I *don’t* think you perfect,—and I *don’t* think you always right and always noble,—and I *don’t* love you in the same way as I used, though I *do* love you just as much,—and, oh!—I’m *so* sorry, but I can’t . . . can’t help it.”

As the last words came unwillingly from her lips, as though she were dragging them out,—she burst into a flood of tears. It cost her even more, than she had thought it would, to tell him. She felt herself untrue, disloyal, and—worst of all—feelingless, as she spoke. She hated herself just at the time, also—hated the change that had come over her, and which was forcing her to think so differently from what she used to.

She had covered her face with her hands, and so could not see the expression on her brother's face. It was as well, perhaps, that she could not. The words, that came in answer to her confession, were enough. If the idol had not been shattered before, it would have been now.

“Claire,” he said angrily, rising and pushing her roughly from him, “why have you been deceiving me?—Why didn't you tell me the truth three months ago?—You might have left me then, to go and become Lambert's wife, if you had wanted to. I never forced you to stay. I didn't want you here, against your will. However, you've not long to wait now,—any day may bring him.”

And this is how he misunderstood her.

It is strange,—strange indeed, how people knit close by the ties of kinship and love, can yet—by quickly-uttered and madly-unreasonable words, wound those whom they love. Husbands and wives, brothers and sisters, parents and children,—those, between whom it should be *impossible* to cast poison-tipped arrows,—seem, at times, to revel in this Devil's pleasure. They lacerate those, whom, just before, they feel they would not hurt or grieve, for whole worlds. They say things that wring the hearts of those, whom they work for, strive for, love—with all the force and fervour of their natures. They give to those, to whom they vow they have bestowed their highest and truest affection,—an agony, before which that love can seem but a bitter mockery. Surely,—*besides* all that love given, there must be an ugly, yet still more precious, vein of *self*-love,—retained. Otherwise, this could not be. For,—however great the provocation, however plausible the misunderstanding, however maddening the temptation,—*true* love should rise above it.

Claire heard the door pulled fiercely to, and shut with a bang. Every evil emotion seemed suddenly striving within her. What had she done, to deserve this, at his hands?

“I *hate* him,” she exclaimed aloud, her eyes flashing, and her lips trembling with passion, “but, I don’t care,—I don’t care,—I’ll show him, I don’t . . .”

She went to the piano, opened it, and began thumping jigs, tunes, polkas,—anything that was light and airy,—anything that he could hear through the wall, to make him know that she wasn’t caring. But,—this wasn’t enough. She would sing,—sing her brightest and silliest songs, and make him mad with anger, because she wouldn’t care. What was the good of all her love and devotion to him, if, in one moment, he could turn on her in the way he had. What,—of all things,—should make him bring up that horrid reference to Lambert, when he knew that she detested him?

She sang loudly and untunefully, in a voice that even she, herself, could scarcely recognise as her own. All the while, her face was set and white with anger. She had

naturally a quick, passionate temper, when roused; but, never before, had anything her brother had said or done, touched her to the quick, as this had. Never before had he so unjustly misinterpreted her words, or so basely attributed an untrue motive for them.

The second song was ended, and thrown down on the floor to make place for a third,—her wildest, merriest ditty, with words in it which she disliked herself, and knew Marc did too.

“I will sing this,” said she, thumping out the idiotic tune, “I will sing it, as if I believed everything in it.”

And she sang it as she had never sung it before, till she reached the last high note ending on the word “hate.” But, instead of the note, came a cry,—muffled and low and bitter in its distress. And, in a moment more, the angry singer, with every bit of wrath gone, was kneeling down at her brother’s empty chair, sobbing as if her heart would break.

“O Marc,—what have I done, that you should speak to me so?” she cried in between

the heavy sobs that convulsed her. “ What have I said that you should so misunderstand me? Can I help changing,—can I help looking above and beyond you? Can I prevent myself wanting more than you can give me? I can’t, oh! I can’t, Marc,—why,—why are you so harsh with me? I do love you, only I don’t—I can’t worship you, as I used to. You are not good,—you are not strong,—you are not noble as . . . as . . . in the same way as—*he* is. But oh!—Marc, my brother, I love you,—don’t, *don’t* speak to me like that,—don’t . . . don’t.”

Is it a blessing or a curse, to be deeply, painfully sensitive? To feel and suffer over and over again, what, to others, with harder hearts and less delicately strung nerves, is as nothing? Or,—is there something wholly exquisite in the midst of acute and lingering suffering?

Outside,—Dr. Sinclair had heard the loud, jigging airs, and the tuneless, mirthful songs. But, before that third song had been brought to its unnatural close, he had caught up his hat and stick, and left the house. The demons of jealousy and remorse were at

war in his heart ; he felt as one possessed,—hateful to himself, hateful to everyone else. What could he do, but get away from all sight and sound,—out into the silent, sightless air. To be alone,—alone, if he could,—with his hateful self.

But, that night was to be an eventful one,—full of sight,—full of sound. One in which, he was to have a part to play, outside himself, and outside his own grievances.

CHAPTER XXIV.

TOO LATE—?

THE night was cold and moist ; but the rain had ceased to fall.

A fresh breeze had risen, and was driving the dark clouds sluggishly across the Heavens. Here and there a feeble star would twinkle, and then be lost again behind the advancing darkness. Here and there,—besides the lights that lit the high road of Abbeyslea, at intervals,—would appear gleams from the unshuttered windows of the houses, that lay along that road. The lights were fitful, flickering ;—the darkness, steady, penetrating. It was the darkness of a moody, restless night ; uncertain what it should, or should not do.

Dr. Sinclair strode out of his garden-gate, with a heavy, rapid tread. He kept along the high road for some little distance ; then, crossing it, plunged into a dark, narrow lane.

It was the same lane that he and Claire had taken, soon after her arrival in Abbeyslea, which ultimately led them to Mrs. Trevor's house. This lane ran along level, though circuitous, for some two hundred yards or so, and then began a gradual ascent. And this ascent continued, until it reached the summit of a hill; on one side of which, half way down a vale stood Mrs. Trevor's house, and on the other, viewed from a little distance, extended Abbeyslea.

The remembrance of that walk, when Spring had been breaking into life and everything was sweet with sound and stir, came back to Marcus Sinclair with mocking plainness. He seemed to hear again Claire's merry laugh, and bright, happy words; and he seemed to listen again to his own careless gaiety, when the shades from life had been lifting, and he had felt as a boy again! Ah!—how, into his whole nature, there had then seemed to creep an enchantment, a soft and delicate beauty,—which had for years been denied him! How, into his iron-cased heart, there had been applied a key, which—even in the turning—had thrilled him!

But, what lay before him now? Where was the beauty of the feelings that he had had then? Where the peace and rest that he had then felt? Where the hopes that he had then cherished?

He smelt the moist, trampled leaves that lay rotting beneath his feet, and likened them to himself and all that lay within him. He heard the swaying of a breaking bough, or the rustling to and fro of some loosened bramble,—and he seemed to recognise a kinship between him and them. He caught the sound of an insect's murmur, or now and again the feeble twitter of a drowsy bird,—and they seemed to him to be joining with him in deplored his unlucky fate.

Fate,—what was his fate? How could he tell? What did he know? Was his life so different to other men's, that he must be brooding over it, and making it out to be worse than it was? Was his fate so adverse, that it could not bear comparison? Ah!—what a fool he was,—what a hypochondriac,—what a self-tormenting idiot!

What was possessing him now? What poisoned arrow was he now perversely

piercing himself with? What new suspicion was taking hold of him? Surely, the fiend of contemptible jealousy was making him mad. And jealousy for what, and about what? Because his sister had told him plainly, that at last she had awoken from a dream, at last she had broken from an illusion, at last she had ceased to worship a myth. If he were a man with any sincerity of feeling, he would be glad to hear of this; and not turn, as a coward, to revile and cavil at it. If her affection for him were deep, as he knew it were, it would not lessen by enlightenment. If his love for her were true, what she told him need not wound it.

And what, again, had induced him, of all things, to bring up Lambert's hateful name? Was it pleasure to him to see her wince,—to know, even as he said it, that his accusation was as groundless as it was despicable? To know, as the stinging words fell from his lips, that they were false. Coward, was no name for him; he was far lower than that. Epithets seemed to lose their flavour, when he applied them to himself;—something stronger, more condemnatory was needed,

than what their most forcible, even, could express.

Jealousy, wrath, wilful miscomprehension, became swallowed up in remorse. And they say—of all bitters, remorse is the most bitter. In it lies a taste, before which gall becomes sweet, and myrrh as honey. There is no balm for it,—save the slow balm of “Time.”

Remorse and dejection sometimes walk hand in hand. They did with Dr. Sinclair. Remorse led him to wish to return back to his home without delay; and, as far as he could, undo what he had done. But the trammels of dejection withheld him. He would condemn himself, hate and loathe himself, *first*. He would do what he had done many times before,—dwell upon the shadow that his own existence made to himself and—as he fancied—to others also. There was a certain ironic satisfaction in this; a satisfaction, not to himself so much, as to life in general.

The lane, he had taken, was dark and lonely,—long too, it seemed; for, he walked but slowly, sometimes stopping still for

moments together, completely lost in contending thought.

The two hundred yards of level had not long been passed, and he had begun the gradual ascent upward. Beneath his feet, the mud lay moist and sticky; and from the fields, on either side of the hedges bordering the lonely lane,—he could feel the damp, white mist, rising and penetrating through. Only now and again, he raised his head to look above and before him; then he would let it sink low on his breast again, and stumble along the uneven way, unseeing,—as best he could.

“It matters not,” he muttered to himself, “the way leads on,—time is of no account,—who should I meet?—why should I care?—nothing matters . . .”

But, as he rose higher up the hill,—and, if he had stayed to glance behind him, would have seen the lights from Abbeyslea glimmering, and further away still, those from the city of O—, he became aware of a curious ruddy hue, that seemed to light the sky in front of him. Once he lifted his head and saw it,—wondered at it, and took no further

account of it. The second time it struck him, that this curious appearance must mean something; and with an effort to get out of and away from himself and his own grievances, he hastened forward.

It was with a feeling of something impending, that he reached the summit of the hill; and found himself looking—not at the red light in the sky,—but below it.

“Ah!—” he exclaimed with a deep breath, standing for a moment, powerless to move.

For, even to a man who has seen something of the world and its disasters, the sudden sight of a house on fire, has its horrid and powerful fascination. The banks of struggling smoke, bursting out beyond the shooting flames; the crackling, hissing, groaning,—medleys of sound, that seem to fill the silent air; the sense of human impotence before the mighty clutches of this fierce god,—are intoxicating to the brain. And, upon this night, and in this place, it all seemed doubly so.

The vale, that lay below, was, in parts, darkly wooded. Half way down it with, seemingly, no other house, or cottage, stood

the Trevors' house. It stood alone; surrounded by its sloping garden, bordered by fields on one side and woods on the other. At its base, ran the swollen river; and, beyond this, rose the gently sloping hills again.

This little vale, with its one single house and grounds, upon every other night, had been lying dark and quiet; with no sound save the stirring of the leaves on the trees, and the gurgling of the full, onward-flowing river; and no light, save the gleams from the windows of that one house, that stood in its midst. But now,—how different! Every tree was lit up keen and large; every shrub looked massive in its size; every piece of sloping ground was marked out, as in a line engraving. Each blade of wet grass, grew separate and glistening; each pathway hollowed sharp, with edges cut by feet, not inches. And from the house,—the quiet, peaceful, creeper-covered house,—poured the volume of smoke and flame, that were lighting up the dark night, and making it fearful in its light.

The charm which held Dr. Sinclair spell-bound and incapable of movement, lasted

but a moment. With a low exclamation of disgust at his own tardiness, he vaulted the gate that led through a field into the side path. This was his nearest way of access, to the burning house.

As he did this,—above the sound of the crackling, greedy flames, above the falling of the loosened timber,—he heard a cry. It was a child's cry of awful terror, piercing through the air; then, suddenly, ceasing with a strange, unnatural abruptness.

With a heart standing still at the thought of what might await his gaze, Dr. Sinclair hurried on.

In the few instants that had to intervene before he could reach the spot, he recalled clearly one thing, that he had that very morning heard. Mr. Trevor was from home. His wife, therefore, was alone with the children and the maidservants in the house. What, then, would be the scene, towards which he was nearing?

The house, formerly, had been a comparatively small one; but, shortly before the Trevors had taken possession of it, a new wing had been added to its left. In this

wing lay the children's nursery and sleeping-room, and one other ; Dr. Sinclair knew this, —being aware of the arrangements of the house, from his constant visits as physician there. And, it struck him, as he drew nearer,—that this was the part of the house, from whence the flames were issuing.

As he rounded the last clump of high-grown shrubs, he felt the hot air beat his face, and his eyes grow seared and misty before the volumes of blinding smoke. For the moment he could see nothing ; he seemed himself enveloped in the lips of flame, that shot out far beyond the walls, down which they crept. But he raised his voice and shouted ; sending his shout above the cries close by, of women's distressed voices and calls for help.

As he ceased, he seemed to hear another sound coming,—straight from above him. He backed slightly, to get further from the heat and blinding smoke ; and, if possible, to see clearly what lay around and before. As he did so, the sound from the burning house came more distinct, and he could now distinguish it as the deep voice of a man.

“Never mind me,”—it was saying—“done utmost to move this bar . . . strength powerless . . . too big to force myself through . . . no other means of,—suffocating . . . bairns safe—God bless—them—My wife . . . too.”

“Save him, save him,—it is for my children’s sake he has perilled his life,—they are safe but—he will be burnt, suffocated—he will . . .”

Mrs. Trevor, with a face pale as death, was clutching hold of Marcus Sinclair’s arm ; and pointing up—up to that part of the house, where the flames were raging.

“He’s there, — Mr. Forrester,” — she breathed, with dry, almost paralyzed lips,—“the nursery window with a bar fixed,—he can’t move it,—for God’s sake, try your strength too.”

In a moment, Marcus Sinclair had grasped the horrible state of the situation. The great-statured John Forrester was shut in by flames on the one side, and by the bar of the window on the other. The one bar—the horizontal one—must have already been forced ; but the other,—the perpendicular

one—was still unmoved. With this bar on the one side and flames on the other,—lay Death.

Sinclair rushed forward, and as he did so, by one of those sudden gusts of wind, the smoke was swept away ; and he saw clearly—and those behind him also saw—standing in the window of the second storey, only twenty feet above the ground,—the form of John Forrester. With his two hands he was grasping the heavy, perpendicular bar, which held him prisoner, and denied the, otherwise, easy exit from the burning house.

In between this bar and the wall,—he had, not long before, passed successively the two frightened, but unhurt, children. Had he been a smaller man, he could have saved himself in the same way. But, he was not. His splendid breadth and stature, were proving the barrier between him and life.

Up against the ledge of the window, stood an iron-runged ladder, round which the flames from the walls were licking. Marcus Sinclair sprang up it, holding his breath and closing his eyes as he did so.

The air drove out from the window in

hot puffs ; and the smoke hid both him and the ladder from the eyes of those anxiously watching.

“ Hold hard,” he shouted, as he reached the topmost rung,—“ it shall yield before our double strength.”

Round the right corner of the house, swept another gust of wind, driving the smoke inward. As it did so, once again the figure and face of John Forrester, were visible. But there was, this time, a change in them. The figure was leaning stark against the bar, which the hands still grasped ; and the charred face was livid.

“ Lay hold to one side,” ordered Sinclair, with his lips close to the unconscious man’s ears.

But, his voice struck into darkness.

With the superhuman strength of despair, Sinclair tore at the fatal bar,—tore at it with the great figure still leaning stark against it. He was too late—he knew it ;—the man he was trying to save was a dead man,—the John Forrester he was shouting to—‘ was not.’

But, still, with the flames licking up around him, and the burning air puffing out and

blinding him, he tore at the iron bar. He laid his hands close to the dead man's hands, and strained every muscle and fibre in his body, to loosen, what the foul fiends themselves, seemed to have fastened in.

Suddenly,—the bar swayed within his grasp; and, the great figure swayed too. He heard a cry of hope and joy rise from the women below,—he heard it,—and then dead against his own knowledge and conviction,—up rose the resolution *not* to believe what he knew.

“Loose the bar, and lean on me,” he shouted again, putting his lips to the deaf ear—“there is room for you to pass now. Lean on me,—the ladder is below.”

But the hands grasped the bar, and moved not at his word.

With the hot flames pressing ever nearer, Sinclair unclasped the hands, bent the loosened bar far to one side, and then, gradually, let the whole weight of the great figure lower down upon himself. As it rested upon him, he clenched his teeth, and made one step downward towards the ladder. He was a strong, finely-developed man him-

self; but, again, it was a superhuman will that gave him strength to support the great lifeless body of John Forrester.

Out poured the hot smoke from the burning rooms;—down the walls shot the flames,—licking round the topmost rungs of the ladder,—licking round the feet and clothes of the live man with his dead burden.

Another cry of hope had burst from the lips of the watching women, as they saw Dr. Sinclair take that first step down the still steady ladder. Then—there was silence;—the smoke had enveloped all in a thick, white cloud, and nothing but faint shadows in the midst of the smoke could be seen.

Silence!—The women dared not cry. The children, removed out of sight of the terrible scene, crouched awed and speechless,—knowing not, what their little lives were costing.

At last the suspense was over. Moments, that were as hours, passed; and Dr. Sinclair, with a face livid as the face of the dead man he was supporting,—took his last step down from the ladder.

“ You have saved him—thank God! —”

“No,”—said he, thick beads of moisture dropping from his brow, as—staggering—he dragged the lifeless body away from the falling timbers and suffocating smoke, and laid it gently down upon the wet, glistening grass,—“*he is dead,—I was . . . too late.*”

CHAPTER XXV.

‘ DEAD.’

BE still,—speak not ; out from the world has passed the soul of a good man. There is a time for thought, there is a time for speech, —this is the time for thought !

Let the world mourn for its loss. Hardly could it spare one of its few. The good lie by units,—far between ; the bad in multiples, —close together. The world could have rejoiced at the loss of one of its bad, but lo,—it has to mourn for one of its good !

Why has the God of Heaven taken what was precious and ill-spared, from His Earth ? —Why has He called one of those, whose true life in the world, was a speaking honour to His Name ?—Why has He cut off that which was bearing good fruit ?

Ask not,—question not the Almighty Will. Think not that thy human understanding can fathom His Omnipotent Purpose. Think not

that thy finite means can compass the depths of His Infinite Results. He is God,—thou art man; be still, then, and know that what He doeth, He doeth in Wisdom, and for the best.

The soul that has “passed,” has passed forth to its glorious rest. The life that was lost, has lost for its gain. The spirit that was *lent* to the Earth, has been received back into mansions not made with hands. The body that was sown in corruption, is waiting to be raised in incorruption. Rejoice, that it is so. Rejoice, with the Saints of God, that the life on earth is over,—the conflict past.

Thank God, that the life that was taken, was the life of a good man. That the noble deed was given to John Forrester to do, and not to Marcus Sinclair. Thank God, that the soul that was received, was received into everlasting light, and not into everlasting darkness. Thank God, that He called the profitable servant, and not the unprofitable one; that, in His Infinite Mercy, He spared what was evil, and took what was good. Bow low, therefore, to Him,—the only Wise

God,—and give to Him, glory and honour for ever and ever.

—As Marion Trevor leant over the great, dead form of John Forrester,—good woman as she was,—she felt a terrible feeling of rebellion rise up within her, against the God who had taken his life. Why had He let his life be nearly saved, but not quite? Why had He given the strength to Dr. Sinclair, to move that fatal bar—just too late? Why had He, in loving kindness, spared her children, and yet not spared also the life of this good man?—Ah!—she could not tell, her heart,—her heart was like a stone.

She looked at the dead man's face, with a slow, tender reverence. What a kind, noble face it was, even burnt and charred, and with that peculiar look upon it, showing that death was caused by suffocation. His long, brown beard,—strangely enough—was only just singed at the ends, not burnt. His hair was tossed off from his forehead, and there lay the mark where he had—dying,—fallen against the bar which—to him—had been the bar to life. The kindly eyes that were so fond of smiling on the children, and

showed something of the great tender heart that lay within—were closed,—closed for ever, she struggled to think;—they would never smile again on earth with that winning sweetness, which had made every child love and cling to him, and call him, “his great friend.” And the mouth,—slightly open, as it always was in life,—looking ready to utter all those kind things that ever lay uppermost; with that great hearty voice, which could fill up and drown all other voices—so sonorous and deep was it.

Oh!—for tears, that she could weep over the life that God had taken! Oh!—for a heart, that felt not like a stone, with a band of iron clasping it round!

She stooped down lower, and reverently pressed her lips to the dead man’s brow. Ah!—how cold it was! She felt a kind of horror seize her; and she drew away, shuddering. What was this thing,—Death? What was this body without—Life?—O God, surely it was not true. Surely that man was mad when he said, he was too late,—that John Forrester was dead. Dead?—All life gone?—The spirit flown?—The soul

returned to the God Who gave it?—Nay, nay,—John Forrester was lying in a stupor, that was all;—he would recover soon,—rouse and speak with his great voice again, and ask to see the children whom he had saved.

The fire,—what of the fire?—Nay,—what mattered it now?—There was no other life for it to take. It would sink and die out, because it had done its foul deed. The flames would lower, and the smoke vanish;—they had shown their hideous power,—what more could they want?—Any pleasure to them to destroy dead, lifeless things, when they had just taken the life from a live, feeling Thing?—The great deed they had to do, was done;—what cared they for little things, after that?

Some one had gone for the fire-engines; John Forrester,—the man in a stupor, not dead,—he had sent someone. She had heard him shout to the sleepy garden-boy, as he stood gaping and idiotic, looking at the spreading flames. And the boy had fled off, glad to be told to do anything,—glad to be forced to go. The fire-engines would come, come round by the road—the longest way,—

come in time to save the ruin of the whole house, come for the sake of sparing some of their possessions. But that was all,—nothing else. They would come like Dr. Sinclair—*too late*.

Why had it been John Forrester, that had been walking that way this night, and seen the smoke bursting out from those back windows? Why hadn't it been some other man,—a brave man who would have sprung up those narrow, burning stairs, and saved the children, in the same way as he had?—What would her husband—Arthur, say,—when he came back and found his friend, John, dead? Suffocated in *his* house,—in saving *his* children. Ah!—if Arthur had been at home, it wouldn't have happened;—he would have been brave and quick enough to have saved his own children,—he would have passed them out from that barred window, and then,—then, he would have escaped himself. For, it was John Forrester's great stature that had cost him his life; if only it had been Arthur, or—even—Dr. Sinclair, standing there in the window of that burning room,—they could have

forced themselves out, between the bar and the wall. But,—it was not; Arthur was away, Dr. Sinclair had come too late, and—John Forrester, the great-hearted, lay dead.

What had caused the fire? How had it spread and gained ground so quickly?—She didn't know. All except that last terrible suspense, all that came before that first overpowering sense of relief and gratitude, when she knew her children were safe,—seemed a blank. The evening gone by,—the peaceful evening, when she had sat reading for awhile,—after which had gone up to kiss her children in their little cots, and then had come down to play over some of Enid's simple violin accompaniments,—all seemed to have been in some other part of her life, long gone by,—not the events of a few hours ago. What was she doing, after she had shut up the piano, and thought how lonely it was without Arthur?—Nothing much,—nothing very notable. She had sat down to think. With her hands idle before her, and the lamp turned low, she had shut her eyes, and in a deliberate, practical way, had set herself to consider, how far her life accorded

with the new Rector of Abbeyslea's views of what life should be. Ah!—she remembered now,—the servants must have gone to bed, she must have thought on and on, longer than she had meant to,—*then*, came the horrible, choking sensation, *then* came the sickening sound from outside,—the sound that only burning can make. What came after,—she could not recall clearly, it was all confusion,—nothing but cries and screams, nothing but struggles to get up that narrow, smoke-hidden staircase into the children's and nurse's rooms, nothing but helplessness, until—the great figure and voice of John Forrester had come. And he,—*he*, who had done all, suffered all—was no more. The stupor in which he lay, was—Death; the stillness which kept guard over him, was the stillness from which no earthly voice could ever arouse him:

Once more, Marion Trevor stooped down and kissed the dead man's cold brow.

“For the Honour and Glory of God,” she murmured, unconsciously repeating the Rector of Abbeyslea's very words.

Then, the heart of stone softened, and the

dry eyes glistened with fast falling tears. A sudden recollection had come to her. Her own kiss on the dead man's brow, had seemed to bring it.

"I saw him hold both my bairns, tight to his great breast, and kiss them before he passed them through to me, as I stood on the ladder,"—she said with a sob,—“O my bairns,—my bairns !”

Then, the Mother left the still, dead body, and went—to her bairns.

CHAPTER XXVI.

BROTHER AND SISTER.

ALL Abbeyslea mourned the death of John Forrester.

He was a man who had made no enemy during life; and, so, in death, was the cause of universal sorrow. He had always said kind things, he had always done good deeds,—as far as the sphere in which he had been placed allowed him to,—thus, even those most inclined to pick holes, found their general accompaniment silent, in reference to him.

John Forrester's widow clad herself in weeds, and nominally mourned deeply the husband she had never had heart enough to love. Perhaps there arose some slight regrets within her, when she thought of the many times she had snubbed him, the many times she had knowingly wounded him. Perhaps also, as the days went by, she

missed his many kindnesses and acts of quiet unselfishness, to which she had grown accustomed and had taken to herself as a matter of course. But, whatever she thought and felt inwardly, to the outside world, Mrs. Forrester was almost ostentatiously subdued and quiet, and constantly bemoaning her 'dear husband.' Some people thought she might have shown more affection and respect for him while he lived, and uncharitably held that she liked to portray a greater sorrow, than what she really felt. But, if these people thought this, perhaps it would have been just as well if they had kept it to themselves; for, there's nothing very fine in spreading an idea, which might just as well be let alone, for all the good that it has in it.

The exact cause of the fire in Mrs. Trevor's house, remained a mystery. Some act of carelessness on the part of one of the servants, previous to their retiring to rest, was surmised. It was thought from some not very coherent or lucid explanations, that a large tin of inflammable oil, had been left in a recess, beneath the narrow staircase, that

led up to this side wing of the house. In this recess were kept sundries that servants always will keep, such as matches, papers, wood,—things that have been prohibited, and yet, somehow, find themselves there. It was conjectured that, before retiring to rest, a light had been obtained from this part, and the usual little unnoticed sparks dropped. But, as has been before said, this could only be surmised ; for, either the servants did not like to own of what act of carelessness they had been guilty, or else—the more likely,—they were far too frightened and stunned, to recollect what they had, or had not done.

The part that Dr. Sinclair had taken in the rescue of the body of John Forrester, soon became known. Not, however, through his own instrumentality ; for he was a man who preferred not speaking of what he, himself, did. In this case, he felt the sadness of the tragedy far too deeply, to think of referring to what had passed. John Forrester's geniality and good-nature, had even penetrated his reserve and cynicism. In his loss, he lost a personal, though, perhaps, unacknowledged friend. A man, who had been

a standing exception to, what he considered, the rule. A man, whose life was a degree above the standard, reached by the majority of men's lives. A man, whose loss must be felt, not by the one or two only who knew him well, but by all with whom he was acquainted.

But there was something besides this feeling of regret at the death of a friend, that made Dr. Sinclair shrink from ever, even, mentioning the name of John Forrester. Physician as he was, accustomed to see Death in all its forms,—still, there seemed to him in this death, to have been a peculiar awfulness. He was always feeling again the weight of that great, lifeless body, bearing down upon him; he was always hearing himself shouting in those ears, that could not hear; he was always—as it were—listening for a sound from those lips, that could not speak.

Sometimes these sensations would press down upon him, with startling nearness; and, it was only with extreme mental effort, that he could reason himself back into the knowledge, that he was not still struggling

to keep Death, from what Death already held. For, that was how it appeared to him. He had spoken to John Forrester, touched him, and laid his weight upon himself,—knowing he was dead, yet refusing to believe it. Knowing that *he*—the spirit, the person, the life,—“*was not*,” yet making himself act, as if he “*were*.” Ah!—he would draw back with all his highly-strung nerves unstrung, before this mysterious Thing, that he had, with man’s pride, striven to combat. Death,—it “yawned before him as a vast, fathomless abyss, as a great unarranged science.” Before it, he trembled; into the meaning of it, he dared not look.

Strangely, it had chanced that twice previous to that night of the fire, the Rev. Liddon had made his way to Dr. Sinclair’s house, for the purpose of calling upon him, and twice had Dr. Sinclair been from home. Whether it were with feelings of relief, or regret, that Dr. Sinclair regarded this consequent delay in making the Rector’s acquaintance, he could not quite decide. At one time he would feel the one sensation; at another, the other. What did he

want with any man's interference, into his private affairs? What did he want with any clergyman, coming to see after him? Why should he wish to disclose what he did, or did not, believe? Why not let him go along in his own way, and with his own prejudices and inward misery, if he wanted to? It was nothing to anyone else. Everyone had left him alone, up till now,—why shouldn't this man?

For, without any indication whatever, Marcus Sinclair intuitively knew, that—at what time and at what place he should meet the new Rector of Abbeyslea,—they would meet as 'man and man,' with all outward ceremony swept aside. He knew,—when he marked, upon that Sunday, the unknown priest in the House of God, and had in his heart distinguished him out as *a man*,—that, if it so happened that he should ever come across him again, alone, he should meet him upon a different standing, to what he had ever met anyone else. And, it was the knowledge of this, that made Marcus Sinclair,—up till the night of John Forrester's death,—regard sometimes with

relief, sometimes with regret, the chance that still kept them strangers.

But, after the night of John Forrester's death, Dr. Sinclair, himself, sought an interview with Ambrose Liddon. The weight of doubt, incredulity, fear—that oppressed him, became so heavy, that he seemed literally driven to take counsel with his fellow-man. He felt so absolutely alone, so cut adrift, so unable to live on in the wretched uncertainty, in the hopeless craving after reality, that had been and still was, seeming to eat into his very life and soul. And so, he determined, with a kind of lofty scorn at his own folly, to turn in—the first evening at his disposal—to Abbeyslea Rectory, and make the acquaintance of the new Rector.

He was, however, prevented doing so, for the first few evenings after, owing to press of work. He went about what he had to do with a kind of restless energy; morose to all outsiders, but more than usually gentle to his sister.

The little tiff they had had, was a thing of the past. The event of that same night, seemed to put all differences in the shade,

making them appear most contemptible, and unworthy of retention. Not that anyhow, would there have remained, any ill-feeling between the brother and sister. Marcus was too well aware of the folly of his own misinterpretation, to be anxious—in any way—to hold to it. And Claire would have been too hopelessly unhappy, if her pride and anger had thought it necessary, to outshine and compress her love. She was only too willing and ready to take back her brother, of whom she was still passionately, though not blindly, fond ; and be to him all that she could be, seeking perhaps all the more earnestly to please and devote herself to him.

Besides, the sudden death of John Forrester,—the man whom, she had once confessed to her brother, if he had not been married, she might perhaps have loved well enough to have married, under certain alteration of circumstances,—came as a severe blow to her. It seemed to damp her wild, free spirits ; and change the young, light-hearted girl into more of a quiet, thoughtful woman. She felt a certain sadness and

depression mingle with all her daily occupations. Perhaps the feeling would be but transient ; still, for the present, there it was, —she could not move it. Whatever she was doing, whatever she was thinking, there seemed to be a shade in it.

Womanlike, she would have liked to have talked over what had happened. Not to outsiders ; she shrunk with a refined sensitiveness, which many could not understand, from even going beyond the garden gates for several days, lest she should meet some one of her acquaintances, who would wish to talk to her, about what everyone around was talking. But, she did wish to speak of it quietly to her brother ; he, who had been so near John Forrester in his last moments, and had, himself, done a brave act, which, however, he had not even spoken of to her, but of which 'Buttons'—with his talent for getting to know everything—had soon made her aware.

In the late afternoon of the fourth day after the night of the fire, Marcus returned from his rounds, more restless and moody than usual. He thought he should have

nothing of importance on hand that evening, so he meant to sneak off on his intended visit to the Rectory. He wasn't going to tell Claire of his determination, for he felt a kind of false shame about going at all; and he did not wish her to know of it,—at all events,—not until after it was over.

“Marc, will you be in this evening?”—asked she, during the course of their short and, at this time, very silent evening meal.

“Well, as far as I know at present, Claire, I shall,”—he said casually,—“I may take a stroll out a little later on, but that won't be on business, I hope.”

“This will be the first evening you have been in since . . .”

“Yes, it is,”—he interrupted shortly,—then added more slowly, smiling as he spoke,—“and you find the evenings very dull and long, when I'm not here,—eh! little sister?”

“Well,—yes, Marc; they *are* long, and they *are* dull, when you are not here,”—she admitted with a sigh,—“but, these last few evenings have been so long and so sad, I thought they would never end. You see, Marc, I . . .”

She paused, hesitating.

"Well?"—said he, not impatiently but frowning slightly, for he thought he knew what was coming.

"I . . . I have so wanted you to talk to, and to tell me a little more about . . . it," she said, almost in a whisper.

"Ah!—must you want to know more?"—he muttered, his dark, melancholy eyes searching her face. Did she, like everyone else, want to talk over—what to him was a thing, that could not well bear being spoken of?

"My heart is so full, and I have only you I care to speak to about it, Marc,"—she said, her lips trembling, for she half understood the meaning of that look upon his face.

"Just this once, then, Claire,"—said he gently, leaning back and folding his arms.

He was, in a way, a selfish man; but, there were times when he would put self in the background, even though it would be at those times when it was at great cost to his own feelings.

"Then, tell me Marc, what you know and what you saw,"—said she,—“tell it me again,

—not because it is a pleasure to me to dwell on the particulars of what happened, but because . . . because . . .”

“ You feel there is a blank in life by John Forrester’s death,”—finished he, meditatively, —“ and you think, perhaps, that by speaking of, and knowing more about, it,—that it will not appear so hard? But I tell you, Claire,” —his voice sharpening—“ that there’s no softening of what you already know. Death remains master of what he lays hold.”

“ He was a good man, Marc,”—said Claire, dropping her eyes as she spoke,—“ it would have been far worse, I suppose, if he had been a bad one.”

“ I don’t know,”—said he, in the tone that expressed that he didn’t choose to own that he knew, either one way or the other,—“ that word ‘ good ’ might mean pretty nearly anything, Claire. Do you mean by it, in this instance, that he was a fine fellow, or that he was religious? Women generally mean the latter when they use the word, I believe.”

“ Well,—I did mean ‘ religious,’ ”—she admitted, flushing,—as so many do, when-

ever they get upon this topic, of which they dislike anyone knowing that they ever think, or wish to speak.

"And 'religious' means—what?" asked he, with some contempt in his tones.

The flush on Claire's face deepened. She hated ever speaking of anything even near religion to her brother; partly, because she knew he scorned, or pretended to scorn it; and partly, because she knew her own ideas upon it were too vague and unsatisfactory, to be at all well expressed. However, having advanced so far, she could not draw back.

"I meant John Forrester was a good man, and went to Church, and was liked by everyone,"—she said, thinking how poor her explanation was, as she made it,—“and then, you know, Mrs. Forrester was such a horrid kind of wife to him, and yet he was always so sweet and forbearing. He never ‘paid her back in her own coin,’—as people call it. I think he must have been a *very* religious man to have lived in the sort of home, she made it for him, and yet always to have been so bright and genial and big-hearted, as he was. If he hadn't been really and truly religious, he couldn't have . . .”

“O no, Claire,—stop there,”—broke in her brother, with a short laugh,—“you don’t really believe in what you’re saying,—you’re only just stating what you have heard. For, I know you don’t hold by that notion, that a man can’t be a fine fellow,—unless he’s religious.”

“I don’t know what I believe, or what I think, exactly, Marc,”—replied she, willing to own her ignorance, but intent upon her point, notwithstanding,—“but, I feel certain that unless John Forrester had been a religious man,—I don’t mean a canting show-religion, but a real one,—that he wouldn’t have been the man he was.”

She spoke very decidedly, for her. Generally, she was inclined to yield her point, if there chanced to be any difference of opinion. Her brother she considered so infinitely her superior, that she was ready on most occasions just to give way to him; and, either, let herself drift into his way of thinking, or else be silent and keep her own “stupid” ideas to herself. But, since the fall of her idol, she did not feel it so disloyal to him, to think different or to let him know that she thought differently.

He looked across at her in some surprise. Then, with the weapon, of which a man sometimes makes use, forgetting it is rather a mean one, unless employed very carefully, he said argumentatively,—

“But then, Claire, you see you don't know much. You haven't seen the world as I have, and you haven't read what I have. It's a very nice hypothesis,—that which you have just brought forward, and I tell you frankly, I wish—yes, Claire, I wish with all my heart, that I could believe that it were true. Mind you, I don't say but what it *may* be true, and I don't for a moment say anything against your holding to the idea, if you like to. But I tell you this,—there are scores of books written nowadays, in which Atheists—and those akin to them like myself—are represented as being able to possess all those virtues which Christians call *Christian* virtues,—and are able to do the finest, noblest deeds, that ever any Christian did. That's the good, or the evil,—I don't know which—which some of the present day books are proud of doing. And if they say what is true, your idea about John Forrester falls through.”

“ Ah !—but there is an *if* in the question,” remarked Claire doggedly, “ and to that *if*, I’ll cling. For, I feel quite differently to what I used to, Marc,—though I seem to be in such a confusion with my ideas. I wish you could help me, but I know you can’t about this, because . . . ”

“ Because I am worse than you are yourself,” finished he grimly,—then added, with a certain fierce conviction,—“ but you would be as sceptical as I am myself, Claire, if you knew the world as I do. If you had been about as I have, and seen what I have, and heard what I have,—you would know by this time, that there are thousands of men and women, who profess Christianity, and yet—are some of the meanest, falsest . . . ”

“ Yes, I know that,” interrupted she hastily, “ but what I was referring to, was a *real* Christian—not a professor,—I meant *real*, you know, like what Mr. Liddon is.”

His name slipped from her lips very naturally. Perhaps she was not yet aware, how often—in her mind’s eye,—she referred to what he was, or what he would do, or what he would think. But, at present, though trammelled by her own confused and

unreasoned-out thoughts,—she felt herself getting hot over the subject, and—as usual, of late—his name rose uppermost in her thoughts.

“Oh !” remarked her brother, with a dead stop after the ejaculation, and looking blank at the door, as he spoke, “and how do you know that he is, what you call,—real ?”

“Because I *do* know that he is,” said she warmly, quite content with her own woman’s reason as an answer.

He turned his eyes rather impatiently upon her. To some men, this unreasoning and unreasoning against “woman’s reason,” has the effect of making them wish, that they had never begun a discussion, which was simply to fall through and come to nothing, owing to this idiotic point,—or, rather, no point,—being brought forward.

In this instance, Dr. Sinclair seized it as an opening, for changing the conversation.

“The Trevors are leaving Abbeyslea to-day,” he remarked, rising as he spoke.

“What?—for always ?” asked she, raising her eyebrows in surprise; “I was going to ask about them, for I am so sorry for them,

poor things ;—they must feel it so dreadfully.”

“ They do,” said he, hovering about the door, but evidently not meaning to leave the room just yet ;—“ poor Mrs. Trevor ! It was an awful sight for any woman to see,—especially a woman like her. But, they’re not going away for always,—it’s only Mrs. Trevor and the two children,—leaving the place for some months probably. It is absolutely necessary, you see, for the child’s sake.”

“ Which ? Enid’s ? ”

“ Yes,—the fright of that night is living in that child’s brain and mind, and she must be taken away from here altogether, at least,—for the present.”

“ And what’s going to happen to Mr. Trevor, then ? ” asked Claire.

“ Happen to him ?—nothing,” answered her brother moodily, “ he has to stick here to his work, of course,—men always have to do that. Sickness,—grief,—death,—may make no difference to the business man,—they have always to go on like machines.”

He laid his hand on the handle of the door.

"One moment more, Marc," pleaded Claire, taking hold of his arm, "I want to go back to what we were talking about first,—just to ask you this one question again."

"But I don't know whether I can answer it, Claire," he said evasively. Claire's straightforward questions were not always easy of answering.

"Yes, you can, Marc," she said in a low voice, "or, at least, you can just say straight out what you do think, though you mayn't be very certain about it."

She hesitated a moment, before putting the question she had already once asked,—and then said, fixing her eyes steadily on him, as she spoke,

"Don't you think it wasn't such a dreadful thing, John Forrester dying in the fire, as he was a good, religious man,—as if he had been a man who didn't think anything of religion?"

The same answer of "I don't know," trembled on Marcus Sinclair's lips. But twice he restrained himself.

When he did speak, a very different answer came.

“*If* there is a God,—*if* there is a Heaven and Hell,—*if* there is an Eternity to be spent in either one place or the other,”—he said, groaning as he spoke, “*then*, thank Heaven, John Forrester was a good man,—thank Heaven, it was him and not me, whose life was taken.”

Half-an-hour after, he went out for a stroll. The stroll led him to the door of the Rectory. Straight there,—there was no hesitation of purpose now.

“Is Mr. Liddon at home?” he asked.

“No, he was not.”

He had been called away suddenly that evening, and was not expected to return until the next day, or even the day after.

With a leaden heart, Marcus Sinclair retraced his steps.

CHAPTER XXVII.

ISLAY COURT.

“ HAVE you ordered my—um aw things to be put together, Beatrice ? ”

“ No, I have not.”

“ Then, why—um haven’t you ? I told you to. You know I’m starting by the—um aw—12.30 train, and it’s nearly—um eleven o’clock now.”

“ Well, Lambert, you could have given the order, yourself. You know I have my hands full with Father. He’s so . . . ”

“ All right, my dear—aw girl, I know all about it ; he’s a bore when he’s ill, and takes up your—um time and attention, and you’ve no memory for anything else.”

“ Lambert, I wish you wouldn’t speak in that disrespectful way of Father,—you don’t half recognise how ill he is, or how anxious I am about him.”

The speaker turned impatiently away, and prepared to leave the room.

Lambert Islay laid the tips of his white, beringed fingers on his cousin's arm.

"My dear girl," he drawled sweetly, "I'm —um just as anxious as you are, only about a different,—aw—well, a different matter. You see I'm awfully anxious to get Claire back here—aw in time, you know. It—it'll be a pretty thing for me,—um for her, I mean,—if I don't get her back in time."

Beatrice's pale face grew paler.

"My Father has not expressed a wish to see her," she said icily, "it's quite your own notion,—this, of fetching her back. I wrote last night to the address you gave me, and told her how ill Father was,—that was quite enough. I do not see, in the least, what difference it can make to you, as to whether she chooses to swallow her pride and come back, unasked, or no."

Lambert smiled serenely,—nonchalantly placed one of his hands in his pockets,—leant against the mantelpiece, and looked first at himself in the mirror, and then at Beatrice retreating from the room.

As she closed the door behind her, he gave a soft, low-drawn whistle.

"Ah!" he drawled to his own company,

“I know the difference it makes, very—aw—considerable to me, I think,—rather to Claire too,—not that the little fool cares—um a hang about the money,—but, what's that—aw to do with me? *I* care about it . . . and *I* care about Claire having her—um aw portion of it, for if . . .”

He finished his sentence with a cultivated, gentlemanly oath; and, as it came from between his lips, he laid his hand on the bell.

“Beatrice be hanged!” he ejaculated mildly, “fair and—statuesque—and aw—above freezing point,—doesn't suit me—aw exactly, even with um—the whole lump. I like down at ‘set fair,’ you know, and hot,—with a good—aw rowdy storm now and again, it's . . .”

Changing his drawl for a moment, to give the footman, who had entered, his order—

“See that my things are put together in my Gladstone,—for a night or so,—and order the trap round at twelve.”

Then, continuing—

“It's rather um—fine on a dark face, but it wasn't worth my while to—aw put myself out again too soon,—left it rather,

well, rather close though,—the old chap's near the end of—um—um—his hook, I suppose. Good riddance to all members,—specially me, I should say—aw. What's the time, by-the-bye,"—pulling his watch leisurely out,—“by George—I suppose I'd better aw—begin to move off,—go and twaddle twaddle to the—um respected uncle, before I go. Policy versus . . . versus—ha!—well, the other thing . . . too much trouble to remember what,—ha, ha !”

And so he left the room.

It was the morning room in Islay Court, the country house of the rich lawyer, Mr. James Islay. Upstairs lay the owner of the house with severe congestion of the lungs, from which the doctors gave small hope of recovery.

Lambert Islay had been staying at Islay Court for the past fortnight; having invited himself there to watch the progress of his uncle's illness. His uncle seemed to like his being there, and took his indolent attentions with a good deal better grace, than all those assiduously lavished upon him by his eldest daughter. And Lambert knew

this, and made the best of the hours, he spent in his uncle's bedroom, to carry forward his own purposes. He had already advanced so far, as to have told his uncle that he had been foolish enough to have entered into an engagement with a young girl of good family and of some prospects. Before he left Islay Court that morning, he intended advancing one step further, and to inform him that his *fiancée*, was no other than his uncle's own second daughter, Claire; and that her future prospects entirely depended upon him—James Islay, himself. Lambert thought it was as well to put it all shortly and clearly to his uncle, and not trouble him with the few slight "impediments," that might make his matrimonial calculations a little premature. It might sound strange to anyone who did not quite follow the lead of his arrangements, for him to express himself as "about to be engaged," and not,—as he had coolly put it—already an accepted suitor.

Cool stoic, though, as Lambert Islay was, he yet felt,—as he knocked at his uncle's door,—that he would rather he were coming

from the business he had in hand, than be just entering upon it. But policy, purpose, and self, were well in the balance; and, added to these were an easy manner and a suave tongue,—and these go a long way. Lambert Islay, complacent coxcomb as he was, had yet enough brains and will in him to see when it was necessary, though troublesome, to make a determined push forward. He had put off long enough; further delay might mean entire defeat, therefore he would get it over and have done with it. There was not much time now, before he must start across country,—therefore, whatever chanced in the course of this interview, of this he was certain, it could not be a prolonged one.

It mattered not whether the result were satisfactory. Lambert meant to catch that 12.30 train; he meant to go off on his intended errand. The plan, he had made, was not going to be disturbed by anyone or any thing, except himself. Even his uncle's wrath, disapprobation, and refusal to own Claire, or alter his will in her favour,—would not, just then, have the slightest effect

upon Lambert's purpose to fetch her back to Islay Court. He meant to get his own way, to carry out his own will, and remove all obstacles, whatever happened, if—if it didn't all turn out to be too much trouble. At present, it was just a comfortable kind of excitement going on, which was rather pleasant than otherwise.

—As Lambert entered his uncle's bedroom by one door, Beatrice—his cousin—left it by the other small side-door, leading into the dressing-room attached to it.

“He generally prefers seeing my Father alone,” she thought, drawing the door close after her, but not latching it; and, as she thought this, she stepped lightly towards the large mirror, that stood on her father's dressing-table.

For two,—three minutes, she stood in front of it, and looked carefully and anxiously at the face reflected in it. She looked at the cold, steel-blue eyes, the fair arched eyebrows, the small, aquiline nose, the thin lips—so like her father's,—the rather pointed chin. She looked closer still at the fair hair, drawn a little stiffly off the white

forehead. The hair was neither golden, nor flaxen, nor light brown;—it was cinnamon-coloured hair with a gloss, and—there was not one thread of grey in it. It was that coloured hair that shows the advance of years, later than any other colour.

A faint, scarcely perceptible smile passed over Beatrice Islay's face, as she looked at the glossy coils of her cinnamon-coloured hair. But, it vanished in the next moment. She had lowered her eyes to her white forehead. This, alas!—showed the days of youth were passed. There were lines in it,—perpendicular, frowning lines, and horizontal, care-worn lines. It was not the forehead of a young girl: years had left their marks upon it.

“I should have kept my face stiller, and more in natural repose,” thought the cold, proud woman, trying to smooth out the lines on her forehead, with her hand.

Still she kept her eyes on the mirror: she looked at her arm and hand as it was upraised, and saw that they were shapely; the arm rounded and curved within the tight-fitting sleeve, and the hand white and small

with tapering fingers. They had beautiful hands in the family,—she knew that,—Claire had small, shapely hands; Marcus had large, muscular ones, delicately formed, blue-veined. But,—even knowing this,—Beatrice admired her own hand, and thought what a shapely hand it was, as she looked at it in the mirror. Then, she lowered it, and gazed again at her face. There were lines by the eyes, and lines on each side of the delicate nose,—not deep lines, but there they were.

“People would take me for thirty,—not a day older,” she thought, looking at the pose of her head, “and he—well, he must be thirty-seven or eight. To outsiders, surely, we should appear well-suited. . . .”

She paused a moment in her thoughts, and a colder and harder look stole over her pale face.

“Men always look younger than women,” she said to herself, “and Lambert is not the man ever to age,—he’s too idle and self-contented. When he’s fifty, I don’t believe he will look a day older.”

She turned impatiently away. As she did so, the sound of her father’s and Lambert’s

voice from the adjoining room, seemed to catch her ear. The low buzz had been going on all the time, but she had been too engrossed with the examination of her own personal appearance, to notice it before. But now, it annoyed and fidgeted her. She hovered round and near the door, but did not go quite close to it. She knew if she kept still and stood by the crack, she could hear what they were saying. But the wish to do this never entered her head,—she was too busy with her own thoughts.

“ Why is he so anxious to get Claire back here ? ” she wondered, creasing the forehead already too much lined, “ they never got on together,—in fact, I believe Claire hated him ;—if there had been anything between them,—any liking,—I should guess his reason. Yet—Lambert never did a thing that was not to further some plan of his own,—he has no thought for anybody else except himself,—it wouldn’t be for Claire’s sake he is giving himself this trouble, and it cannot,—no, it cannot be for mine. Her return here will not . . . ”

She felt half-ashamed of the thought, that

rose in her mind. Not that she possessed any sisterly affection for Claire; no tender feeling stirred her breast for this, her only sister. But still, she didn't quite like to own the thought which took possession of her, and looked, in its first unveiling, rather an ugly thought. She respected her father; did, and always had done strictly according to his will,—but that was all. She could not love him; she had never tried to; it was an effort on her part to love anybody or anything, and it was not likely she would attempt to lavish upon him, what he would neither appreciate, nor value.

Lambert's meandering drawl from the next room, seemed to hum on and on without cessation. It was rather a musical sound to listen to, rising and sinking in a kind of sing-song way. He appeared to be doing all the talking; for it was only now and again, that the lawyer's weak, yet keen-edged, voice, interrupted its easy flow.

“He's run down almost to his last penny,” murmured she, changing the current of her thoughts somewhat, in order to try and crush the thought that had arisen, and of which she was ashamed, “he will continue

his borrowing system for a bit longer, or manage to smooth Father into advancing him some trifle. But it can't go on—clever as he is, handsome as he is,—he will have to face it. I know more than he thinks I do, and more a great deal than he would wish. Ah! Lambert,—Lambert,—how much longer will you put it off?"

She sighed, and the steel blue eyes grew less steely and cold; there was a shade of warmth and passion in them. For, curiously, the only person in the world, whom Beatrice Islay cared for, was this handsome, selfish, spendthrift of a cousin. She had been proudly and distantly attached to him for years; but she had been two well-bred, too much of an aristocrat, too severely principled,—to show it. He had treated her always with the familiarity of a brother, when it pleased him; or, with the studied unconcern of a mere passing acquaintance; whichever suited his fancy,—it made no difference to him. He didn't admire the cold, statue-like beauty of his eldest cousin; though, he thought with some impatience of the money that would pass to her.

"He doesn't know that I care for him,"

thought the pale, reserved woman, her thin lips twitching, "perhaps . . ."

But the train of her thoughts was brought to a sudden standstill. From out the adjoining room, she heard the name of her youngest sister, twice repeated with angry force by her father's voice ; and after the name came an outburst of epithets and oaths, which shewed her, all too plainly, that Lambert had been attacking a prohibited subject. Prohibited, because he knew, that in her father's present critical condition, it was of serious importance that no topic of conversation should be broached, upon which the patient was likely to become at all excited, or roused.

With quick decision, Beatrice laid her hand on the door. It was her duty to put an end to this interview, whether Lambert wished it or no. And again the ugly thought, which was developing into a wish, in connection with Claire, crossed her mind.

"It seems—um a pity, you see,"—her cousin's voice was drawling, in would-be conciliating tones,—“that the old—aw name of Islay should pass—um out, you know, of the . . .”

“Lambert, I must beg that you don’t discuss business subjects,”—interrupted Beatrice’s voice,—“my Father is not in a fit state to be disturbed.”

Lambert looked up at the intruder, as she stood within the doorway, with an expression on his handsome face, before which Beatrice’s steel eyes dropped. She knew by the curl of his lip, plainly visible beneath his fair moustache, that he thought she had been listening.

“Thank you, Beatrice,”—he said, not rising from his chair, but pointing to the other door in the room, opening on to the passage,—“but since you have done us—um the honour, of listening to our conversation so far, I must—um aw—beg that you leave us alone now. I have—um only five minutes more, so perhaps—um, for a change, during that—aw period—you will—um favour us with your—aw absence.”

Beatrice’s pride was stung to the quick. Without a word, she made her way to the door, towards which Lambert still pointed. When she reached it, she turned and faced both her father and cousin.

"It may be a pity,"—she said, in a voice sharp and untuneful, and a face contracted with anger,—“that the old name should be changed, or the property, in the future, belong to any but an Islay,—but I should have thought that that was my Father's or my affair,—not *yours*.”

She was too proud to undeceive Lambert. Too proud to tell him that she had heard nothing, except her father's angry utterance of her sister's name, and the few words of Lambert's own,—upon which, in her wrath, she had just demeaned herself to express an opinion.

As she closed the door behind, Lambert rose and went towards the other—the dressing-room door; and, with a sharp click, latched it, and turned the key.

“Pride hath—um—a fall,”—he thought, with a disagreeable glitter in his eye,—“an eavesdropper aw,—she—um knows my—um intention about Claire, I suppose. Hang it—but I don't—aw care.”

But Lambert Islay had made a mistake. Beatrice had not guessed his intention towards Claire. By some extraordinary dul-

ness of comprehension, she did not place Lambert's remark in reference to the property and name of Islay, side by side with her father's angry utterance of his second daughter's name. Perhaps the sting of Lambert's unjust accusation, drove even the very thought of Claire, out of her mind. For,—all that she said to herself, as she listened to the rapid turn of the wheels of the trap, that, a few minutes after, was taking her cousin to the station, was—

“ No other man would have dared to insult me, as he has. I have waited too long,—I have stood aside to no purpose. But yet—yet, for the sake of obtaining what I have spent the best part of my life in waiting for—I will pass it over. When he returns, I will be—ready for him.”

So, there was a misunderstanding on both sides. But, the one on Beatrice's,—was the greater.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE LETTER RECEIVED.

“MARC,—look what I have received by this morning’s post ! ”

“The postman doesn’t often favour you, Claire,”—remarked her brother, stretching forward to reach the letter, she was handing him.

It was a short, cold letter from Beatrice Islay, informing her sister that their father was seriously ill, and that the doctors thought, at his age, it was very questionable, as to whether he would ever get over it. The letter, after stating this fact, went on to say that Claire’s father had expressed no wish for her to be made aware of his illness, but that the writer—Beatrice—thought it her duty to send her sister information concerning it. The letter concluded with a formal expression of sisterly affection, interjoined with a chilly inquiry for her welfare,—after

which, the writer signed her full name and address.

Marcus Sinclair read it over silently. Claire watched him. She did not love her father ; she would have, if he had let her ; but, he never had. Any expression or words of love on her part, had always been nipped by a freezing look, or burned by a cutting satire. But Claire had a tender heart, and all that was past was forgiven. She felt sorry for her father ; sorry that he was suffering, sorry that the doctors thought so badly of him, sorry—also—that he had Beatrice only to look after him. Perhaps, he was not so hard and bitter when he was ill ; perhaps, if she had been at home now, she might have got on better with him.

When Marcus had finished reading over Beatrice's letter, he turned back to the first page again, and began reading it a second time. There was a peculiar set look upon his face as he did so. He glanced over the words that second time slowly, carefully ;—but, though he turned the page again and, seemingly, read on down to the signature, he was not heeding what he was doing,—he was

not taking in the meaning of the words. He was only seeing, only taking in what was *not* there. There was not a single reference or inquiry after himself; he might just as well not have existed, for aught he was acknowledged. This was just as he wished it to be, or, at least, once, had wished, and, nominally, did still wish it to be, and yet,—it cut him hard. To Beatrice,—his eldest sister,—he might just as well have been a dead man, just as well perhaps never have been at all.

But,—there were several other things that were not in that short, cold letter, either. There was not a single expression of regret, for the critical state in which the writer's father now lay. There was not a single word slipped, which might lead Claire to suppose, that her elder sister deplored her absence from home. There was not a single wish for the least sympathy,—the least natural craving after help and companionship. And, there was not even one word given, that Claire might take as a call to return home to be with the father,—who, indeed, had been as no father to them,—but yet, to be with him in, what might be, his last few days.

upon earth. There were many things that were *not* in Beatrice Islay's letter.

Marcus Sinclair turned from the letter to the envelope. He examined the address on it. It was a perfectly correct address, and was written in the same handwriting as that in the letter. A neat, rather stiff, lady's handwriting.

“The address is correct,”—was his first remark,—“she must, of course, have got it from Lambert.”

He wasn't thinking of the address or of the envelope, as he turned it over; but he made the remark about it, simply because he did not wish to express what he was thinking of.

“Yes,”—said Claire, in a tone which meant that that wasn't what she expected him to say.

“Another cup of tea, please,” he said next, handing her his empty cup,—“the water's not boiling this morning,—it's wretched stuff, Claire.”

She silently poured out the tea, put two lumps of sugar in it, forgot to add some milk, and handed it back to him.

"Well—Marc?" she said, with a pause between the two words.

"Well, Claire?"—he said, reaching forward for the milk-jug.

"Oh!—Marc, aren't you sorry?" she said, with reproof at his callousness in her tones.

"You haven't said you are, yet,"—he said grimly,—“and why should I?—it's nothing to do with me.”

"Nothing to do with you, Marc?" she broke out with,—forgetting everything, forgetting that once she would have bitten her tongue off, rather than have pained him, by bringing back to him past recollections,—“why,—it's as much to do with you, as it is with me and Beatrice. He's our Father, Marc, and he's dying, and of course,—of course . . .”

She hesitated.

"Of course, what, Claire?" asked he, pushing his plate, cup, and papers noisily from him.

"I don't know, Marc," she began,—then, added quickly,—“Yes, I do, but I don't like to say.”

"You may as well say, what you thought

of saying," he said ungraciously,—“ it won’t make any difference to me, you know.”

“ Then, it’s no good saying anything at all, is it ? ” she remarked pathetically,—“ I had better keep it to myself.”

But,—he did not mean that at all. He wanted to hear what she had to say, though he did not mean to let it make any difference with him.

“ You can’t keep it to yourself, Claire,” he asserted,—and, then, repeating his question, —“ of course, what ? ”

“ Well, I meant,—I meant, of course you would—would,”—she stammered, growing very red and uncomfortable,—“ but I don’t . . . don’t like to say, what I was going to say, Marc. You won’t like it,—I know you won’t. I didn’t think before, but—I have thought now.”

“ Don’t think, then,” said he shortly,—“ but, tell me,—I wish to know.”

That “ I wish to know,” was equivalent to “ I will know.”

Claire drew lines on the cloth ; and, with her eyes on her design, began,

“ I thought of course, Marc,—if he were

dying, you would,—I mean, you wouldn't like not to see him again;—you wouldn't like to keep up all that kind of feud there is between you, because,—you see, if he's going to die, well—it wouldn't be any good, would it?"

Claire had introduced a bit of logic, which had disclosed itself to her mind, only after she had begun speaking.

"Well?" said Dr. Sinclair interrogatively, ignoring her question.

"That's all, Marc,"—she said, still keeping her eyes on the cloth,—"I haven't anything else to say, except—that I feel so sorry he's ill, and perhaps I never tried enough to please him,—and it must be rather hard for Beatrice, nursing him alone, especially if—well, if he's as hard to please, as he is when he's well,—and I don't know exactly what to do, only I wish Beatrice had said something about my going home for a day, or two days to see him, if—if, you know, Marc,—he's so ill."

As she finished this long postscript, she raised her eyes half-frightened,—to see how her brother was taking what she was saying.

He was looking out of the window, not at her; but she could see the heavy droop of his mouth, as he did so.

“Then ; you wish to go—there ?” — he said coldly.

“No, I didn’t say I wished to go, exactly,” explained she,—“I only said, I wished Beatrice had just said something about liking me to be there. It’s rather,—well, rather unnatural, don’t you think, Marc,—we two stopping away, and not seeming to care or trouble ourselves a . . .”

“Unnatural ?—no,”—he broke in fiercely, the blue veins on his forehead standing out as knotted cords,—“it was unnatural, if you like, for him to have turned me off as a servant,—as a dog from his house;—it has been unnatural for him never to have stirred a finger, to find out what had become of me ; it has been unnatural his—as good as—acting in the same way towards you, because you chose to cast in your lot with me;—and, it’s unnatural now, his lying there on his death-bed, and yet never so much as asking for you, or expressing a wish for your return. For myself, Claire—it’s nothing ;

but, for you, it's most, most,—I know no word to express myself."

He marched angrily up and down the room, with Beatrice's letter still in his hand.

Little did he recognise, how unreasonable he was; or, how inconsistent. He had wished the whole of the Past buried; he had wished the home of his infancy and boyhood to vanish from his mind; he had wished his father,—Beatrice,—Lambert,—all his home-connections and ties—to be entirely separated, and as nothing to him; he had wished every chain that joined his present life with his past, severed:—and, yet, here he was condemning all that had come to pass, which had been in strict accordance with those wishes. It was all true what he said now, for it *was* unnatural. But, had he not, himself, been straining at this unnaturalness? Was it all on his father's side? Were there not some germs of the same disease, struggling to take root in his own nature?

Alas!—how little a man knows himself, and his own inconsistencies! Marcus Sinclair's outward and inward self, were at

variance. In this, he certainly was not peculiar; for, perhaps, out of every hundred persons, ninety would have to confess to the same idiosyncrasy. The more peculiar part is, that man shrinks from exposing his inner self, which is often the higher, nobler, better self; and prefers showing the hard, superficial and bigoted outer crust,—of which the best part of him is secretly ashamed.

It was not that Marcus Sinclair, from the very beginning of his banishment from home, had cherished a desire that what was done, could be undone. It was not that after a few years' isolation, he had felt drawn to those from whom he was separated. It was not that, after awhile, in his heart, he forgave his father, the life-long injury he had done him. It was not that *now* he would openly have acknowledged, that his feelings were changing from what they had once been. But, unknown to himself, ever since he had brought Claire back to make her home with him, there had been a certain softening influence surrounding him,—an influence, scarcely recognised, scarcely felt, but one which, nevertheless, possessed the

subtle charm of imperceptibly moving old prejudices and changing old, narrow notions. Marcus Sinclair still cherished the old, unforgiving spirit towards his father; still—apparently—desired to remain separated and unrecognised by his family, still jealously guarded Claire, still nominally stuck to what he had been battling for ever since his banishment from home;—*but*, side by side, with these old feelings, lay others, lessening the force and possession of these old ones. And it was the expression of these, in his angry declaration of his father's unnaturalness, that made him appear inconsistent.

He wished to be as one—dead to his family; yet, he felt wounded by Beatrice's ignoring his very existence. He desired to be as a stranger to his father; yet, he was stung by his father's negligence of him. He insisted upon Claire's severance, from all that connected her with the past; yet, he was roused by the cool indifference, with which she was treated. He would have thought twice, before he would let her return to the old home; yet, he was angered, because she hadn't been asked. Even to

himself,—if he had given himself time to think,—he must have appeared in the light of an enigma.

Claire was too busy with her own thoughts and calculations, to notice his apparent inconsistencies. What struck her most was, that her brother seemed to have expected that she would have received a call to return home. And it was to this point, that she referred, when she next spoke.

“Marc,” she said gravely, “supposing Father *had* wished to see me again, and *had* made Beatrice write and beg me to return home,—would you have let me go just for one or two days,—to see him?”

He didn’t answer her for a moment. He was wondering how far he had any power to exercise authority over her movements. He was thinking how few would yield to his will in the simple, ready way, that she did. He was also trying to come to a conclusion, as to what his answer to her question should be. Not, however, being successful in this latter endeavour, he was obliged to satisfy himself, and her, with an evasive reply.

"Suppositions are nothing," he said tersely, "your Father is just the same now as he has always been,—hard,—bitter,—unforgiving. Even on a sick-bed, there is no relenting towards anyone, who hasn't bowed to his will, and followed in his wake."

His face grew more and more clouded, as he spoke. The recollections of what he had suffered in his boyhood from his father's hands, seemed bearing down upon him; and, as it did so, he crushed all feeling within him, and cased in his heart.

"If I were you, Claire," he went on, handing her back Beatrice's letter, "I should just burn that, and think no more about it. He, who is now dying, has been no Father to us."

Claire turned her face from him, but didn't speak.

How hard he was, himself,—she thought,—hard and unforgiving. How could she ever have thought him perfect?

It was a pouring wet morning; dark, wretched-looking. The clouds lay heavy and low in the sky, bearing down close on the sodden earth. Claire went and looked silently out of the window, while her brother

fidgeted about in the hall to find his mackintosh and umbrella. Generally, his sister found these things for him, when required; she was always ready to do anything which would save him trouble. This morning, however, she seemed to have forgotten.

But, just before he started out, a sudden idea struck her.

“Marc,” she called.

“Yes.”

“I want to speak to you just one moment before you go.”

He put his head in at the door. He had found his mackintosh, and was struggling into it.

“I don’t think Lambert will come now,” said his sister positively,—hastily crossing the room to assist him.

“Why?” asked he, in surprise.

“Oh!—because he only wanted the money, he thought I was going to have if I left you and went home and made it up with Father,”—said Claire, putting the case quite plainly, “and now,—he’ll see he’s too late. Not that it would have made any difference, anyhow,”—she added, with a flash of her eyes.

"No,—I know it wouldn't, Claire," said he, gently.

He always seized every opportunity he could, to show her that the words he had once spoken in reference to her and Lambert, were entirely false words.

She felt the delicacy of his thought, and drew closer to him.

"Don't you think—with me—that now, he won't come?" she asked, taking his two hands in hers,—“because it—well—um,—it won't—aw—be worth his while.”

They both laughed at her literal imitation of Lambert's word-expression and drawling intonation.

But Marcus's laugh ended with a sharp contraction of his heavy brows.

"Claire, it isn't too late, yet,"—he said reluctantly,—“he may think this is just the nick of time for him to make his appearance. But don't worry yourself,—he cannot force you against your will, even under cover of your father's wish for your immediate return. And—perhaps,—after all,—as you say,—he may think as he has left it so late, that it is 'not worth his while.' ”

CHAPTER XXIX.

LAMBERT'S RETURN.

IT was about three o'clock in the afternoon of the day after the arrival of Beatrice's letter, that found Lambert Islay strolling leisurely up the short drive, leading to Dr. Sinclair's house. He had reached the city of O—, during the early hours of that morning; and, having rested, refreshed, and installed himself at one of the largest hotels there, he had, shortly after a heavy luncheon, taken a hansom and driven to within a few yards of his cousin's gate.

Lambert Islay had that easy, confident way of walking, that some men have,—which seems to express that, whatever ground they may be treading on, and whatever house they may be approaching,—that house and that ground are theirs; and that they have known them and been masters of them all their lives. As they enter a hall of a

house, that hall is their hall; and, as they pass into a room, that room becomes their room. The chair they sit in, is their chair; and the things, they casually cast their eyes round upon, are their things. When the master or mistress of that room enters,—he, or she, is entertained by them; and any courtesy or hospitality shown, is shown by them; any favour conferred is conferred by them. The real master of the house is no one at all, when they are near!

Lambert Islay would have turned up his aristocratic nose, at being possessor of his cousin's small house and grounds; but, for all that, as he walked towards the front door of that house,—both the house and the grounds belonged to him. The trees, the paths, the sloping lawn,—even, Franz Humbert's house visible in the adjoining garden—were his. If the master of that garden had been found gardening, Lambert would probably have let him know that *he* considered it an ungentlemanly thing to garden; and quite ignore the fact that the master of that garden might garden if he liked, and was perfectly capable of judging whether the occupation of garden-

ing were ungentlemanly, or no. But, that would not have affected Lambert ; he would go next into a lord's house and grounds, and do the same thing there, if he felt inclined.

It chanced that that afternoon Claire had gone out. She hadn't been out for several days beyond the garden ; but, on this afternoon,—the weather having cleared, and she, feeling restless and unhappy about the news received the day before,—had put on her thick boots, and started out for a long, solitary walk. The sun was shining and the air keen and fresh, though still damp from the moisture rising from the earth. The trees, with every stir of wind, were inclined to act as shower-baths ; and the roads and paths were looking washed from the many hours of continued rain, that had poured down upon them. Still, it was a pleasant afternoon,—bright, crisp, inviting-looking, after the dark and dreary days, that had come before.

Lambert Islay, on being informed of Claire's absence from home, said that he would await her return. It was too moist underfoot, for him to care to pass the intervening time out in the air, and so he authorised 'Buttons'

to show him into a comfortable room with a fire and an easy chair.

Jock recognised this gentleman again, as the one whom he had been particularly struck by, some months ago when he had called. He remembered also, though, that his master had not seemed very well pleased, when he had come in and found him with Miss Claire. And Jock had also another recollection about this gentleman,—which biassed his opinion even still more. Jock had not been treated by this gentleman with all the respect, that a young man in his position, called for. Thus it was, that Jock was annoyed, rather than otherwise, that neither his master nor mistress was at home; and that, therefore, there was no help for it, but that he must do this gentleman's bidding.

He demurred rather as to whether he should show him into his master's consulting room, or into the dining-room. There was no fire that afternoon in the drawing-room; and the gentleman wished for one, so he couldn't show him in there.

As he led the way across the hall in the direction of the two rooms, he finally decided

upon the latter. If his master didn't care for this gentleman coming here—was his argument,—he certainly wouldn't be particularly pleased to have him admitted to his consulting room.

The dining-room was a smaller and poorer-furnished room, than the others in the house. Dr. Sinclair's means were limited, and he preferred living within his income, to outside it. In time, he hoped to move into a larger, better house, and to furnish it accordingly ; but, for the present, he had to be content with what he had.

His fastidious cousin gave a grunt of contempt, as he looked round and saw the smallness and poorness of the room, into which he had been shown. There was certainly a good fire burning, and a low chair standing by it,—which he had asked for. But there were no papers and novels lying about, with which to pass the time ; besides,—there was another room in the house better than this,—why hadn't he been shown in there ?

So Lambert Islay,—after taking a hasty survey, and drawing out an imprecation or two, stepped up to the bell and rang for Jock

again. He preferred the drawing-room, also he wanted the papers of the day and any novels, Jock's master might have about.

Jock, however, could not satisfy him upon any of these points, except in providing him with some papers. He also took the opportunity of gleaming upon the exacting visitor with a certain look of triumph, as he informed him that there was no fire in the drawing-room, and that his master,—being a clever doctor—only read deep, doctoring books. And nothing more than this was to be got out of Jock, though the fine gentleman swore mildly at him, and at the evident pleasure with which he delivered his information.

The papers—like most medical men's papers—were all of them old, except one; which one, Lambert had seen and glanced over that morning at the hotel. So he threw the whole miscellaneous lot, with which Jock had provided him, aside,—let himself gently down into the easy chair, and with a few more muttered ejaculations of a gentlemanly sort,—stretched out his legs before the fire, and began to do a most unusual thing for

him. He began to *think*,—to cast over in his mind what he should, or should not do. This was a very novel proceeding, and one which he only indulged in occasionally. As a rule, it was too much trouble to think. As a rule,—if a plan came into his head, and that plan suited his inclination, he just carried it out, if it were worth his while; and, if it could be done without much disturbance to his physical and mental torpor.

During the time he was travelling, on his way to O—, he had not troubled himself with thinking how best he should carry out what he intended doing. He had been far more occupied in making himself comfortable with rugs and furbelows, in obtaining the best wines at the refreshment stalls, and in making mild complaints to the Railway Company servants upon certain times or arrangements, that did not exactly suit his convenience. Occasionally, perhaps, he had been visited by thoughts concerning his not-altogether-satisfactory parting interview with his uncle. And, once or twice, he recollects that, at the last time when he had presented himself at Dr. Sinclair's house, he had not been

received in quite the pleasantest way. It just occurred to him that he had quitted the house, well—not exactly baffled in his intention, but still—certainly not the undisputed victor of the position, upon which he had calculated. But, further than these few passing recollections, which came unrequested to his easy mind, he did not see that he need trouble himself. He was a clever fellow with plenty of brains, whenever he chose to use them. He was always satisfied with what he did, or did not do. He had always plenty of words, phrases and sentiments at his disposal. And he had a cool, imperturbable temper, which generally possessed the happy knack of upsetting and disorganising other people's tempers; making them say and do unwise things in the heat of the moment, while he could look on calmly, and from his standpoint of *sang-froid*,—use what they lost for his own advantage. What need, therefore, was there for him to exercise himself, upon what was or was not going to take place.

However, in this exceptional instance, Lambert Islay found it was an easier and

more peaceable thing, to give himself up to the thoughts and reflections, that seemed to insist upon taking possession of his mind,—than it was to try and drive them away, by substituting other ones.

He became aware, as he softly handled his moustache, that there might arise some difficulties in carrying out this plan of his, in reference to Claire and his uncle's will, and some few other things connected with these two principal actors in his little drama. His uncle, certainly, had been very irate when he had, after considerable perambulations and beatings about the bush, informed him that he was engaged to Claire,—whose very name, like her brother's, James Islay had desired should never be even mentioned before him. And the old man had certainly put it plain enough that, by the step she had taken in leaving her home to live with her disinherited brother, she had forfeited the whole of what would, otherwise, have been hers,—namely, that entailed by her being left co-heiress with her elder sister, Beatrice, of all that he was worth. In this respect therefore, there lay difficulties, and the need

for skilful manœuvring ; of which latter, however, Lambert Islay did not hold himself incompetent.

But Lambert had, during the last five minutes of his interview with his uncle, rapidly played two cards ; both of which, he knew to be good ones. Upon these two, he—as good as—staked his success. They became all the more forcible by being played together, in that they touched the old man in the same part. The part of him which they touched,—and touched very nearly,—was his pride. And, as this property occupied a very important position in his nature, Lambert had chosen well in selecting it as the medium for furthering the success of his plans.

The two cards, which he played, were the following :—He represented—in the first place—to his uncle that, in the event of Beatrice marrying anyone outside the family name and connection, the Islay property would pass away from the old family, and the Islay wealth be handed down to a new name and to a new connection. Both of which were very undesirable ; but, as the only son of

James Islay had been disinherited, and thus his claim to the name and property of no value,—it depended upon the arrangement that James Islay should make for one of his daughters, as to whether the said name, property, and wealth should, or should not, pass out of the Islay family. And it was here, at this point, that Lambert had disclosed his love for, and intention of, marrying his uncle's second daughter, Claire. As he had fully expected, James Islay,—after the first paroxysm of rage at his nephew's insufferable coolness and insolence in, both, mentioning his second daughter's name, and suggesting an alliance with her,—expressed himself surprised that Beatrice (to whom the whole property and money would pass as, at present, arranged) had not been chosen, as being more suitable, more sure, and more worthy in every respect. Upon this, however, Lambert had shown himself obdurate. He had declared that Beatrice was not to his taste; that nothing would ever induce him to marry her, even if she had ten times the portion she already had; and that he intended marrying Claire, whether his uncle altered his will in her

favour, or no. This, at least, was what he stated to James Islay. He had no real intention of marrying Claire, unless she were left co-heiress with Beatrice; but it suited his plans to represent to his uncle, his unalterable determination concerning her.

This was the outcome of the first card he played. The second, which he brought down immediately to bear upon the first, referred more exclusively to himself, his own honour, and—also—as he strongly pointed out—the honour of the Islay family and name. In a few plain words, he acquainted his uncle with the fact, that he had run through all his money, that he was heavily in debt, and that, within a very short period, unless some substantial change in the state of his finances took place, his honour would be forfeited and his name disgraced.

It was a daring piece of play; but Lambert Islay did not hesitate to risk it, for the chance of its ultimately proving the necessary move in favour of his own ends. He knew the old man's pride in the ancient, unstained name of Islay. He calculated also upon the one weakness in James Islay's hard, arrogant

nature,—the weakness he had for his, Lambert's, own handsome, idle self. And thus it was, with his usual cool, high-handed confidence that, having just touched with a good deal of skill upon these several points,—he left his uncle, telling him, finally, as he quitted the room, that he had taken his—James Islay's—will and conjunction with his plans, as granted—and thus, was on his way then to fetch Claire.

“There's nothing aw—that comes up to the play of taking things for granted,”—drawled Lambert, as he leisurely summarised in his own mind, what had taken place in the short, parting interview with his uncle,—“it acts as a kind of—um, well—mesmerising force, and takes effect sooner than—aw—anything else. It saves an awful lot of—aw trouble too ;—nothing pays so well, because —um aw, if er—it doesn't succeed, there's no dilly aw dallying,—all comes out and it's done—um for,—one way or the other.”

He lounged back further into the easy chair, and lazily let his eyes take a minute survey of his surroundings.

“She's a little fool to wish to stop in this

hole,"—he went on sneeringly—"by George, but I should—aw think, she's pretty sick of it by now,—will um—thank me for—er being magnanimous enough to pass over her—um aw little tantrums and whimseys of—er last time. A pretty gipsy she looked, though,—cuts Beatrice out altogether,—soft, dark cheek, eyes—ah! . . ."

Lambert Islay had rather particular notions of feminine beauty. He never thought of treating a woman with any reverence or refined courtesy, because she was a woman; but he liked toying and amusing himself and his fancy, with anything that was pretty. And, though he had seen many women far more beautiful than his cousin, his cool, torpid disposition had been, somehow, more than usually attracted by the fire and warmth of her nature, and the natural piquancy of her dark beauty. As much as a man of Lambert's superficial nature could be in love, or fancy himself in love with anyone,—Lambert was with his cousin, Claire. It certainly would not have been worth his while to have gone through what he had done, if he had not had some kind of unusual feeling for her. He would not have been anxious for his

uncle to alter his will in her favour, if he hadn't some sort of desire, to possess her as well as her money. For, he could have had Beatrice and the whole of the money, if he had chosen. But he had a notion that the satisfaction of possessing double money and Beatrice would not have equalled half money and Claire.

Having given himself over to some rather pleasing thoughts respecting her, he found himself passing on to consider, which would be his best plan of procedure upon her return home from her walk,—the which interruption to the easy flow of his thoughts, he supposed he might expect at any moment now. He conjectured, perhaps,—that it would pay best in the first place, to make out that he had been commissioned by her father—who now lay at death's door—to entreat her immediate return to Islay Court. He might represent the old man's anxiety to effect a reconciliation before his death; he might dwell upon the feverish eagerness with which he awaited her arrival, and the need there was—owing to the critical state in which he was lying—that there should be no delay. All this would be easy enough to do, thought

Lambert, and—on the whole, for once—he would rest content not to mention himself, or his own intentions just at present. He could do a great deal to further his own suit, when once he had decoyed Claire out of her brother's hands. This was the first step to take; after that, difficulties—even those connected with Claire's obdurate old father—would be but small, in comparison.

Curiously, Lambert Islay calmly placed Claire's brother, outside his reckoning altogether. He was aware that a great deal depended on him; that Claire's decision to obey or disobey her father's summons, would probably be according to his decision; and that the furtherance of his—Lambert's—plans might be baulked and counter-checked very considerably by the master of the house, under whose roof he now lounged. But, with most characteristic *nonchalance*, Lambert preferred not thinking of, and not reckoning upon, what his muscular and headstrong male cousin would, or would not, do. He simply ignored him in his arrangements altogether. For—to his mind—plans and calculations were all very

well, up to a certain point, but—when taken beyond— they became more troublesome than they were worth. The ‘beyond’ the point in Lambert’s mind, upon this instance, meant—considering Claire’s brother. Before, when he had visited Abbeyslea, he had comfortably assured himself that all would be right, and that his coolness and good-humour would clear the way. As it happened, however, his expectations had been a little frustrated, but—it had not mattered much. Why then should he trouble his brain now,—the whole thing would not be worth his while, if he really had to put himself very considerably out about it. He was a clever fellow, and—as a rule—a lucky one too, except in his own money matters; so, he’d trust to chance to prove him more than equal to Marcus Sinclair’s physical and mental obstructions.

Lambert Islay, having allowed his thoughts casually to travel in this direction, was just about to relieve their monotony, by deviating their course, when—he heard a heavy step in the hall. It seemed to take three strides towards the door of the room, in which he,

Lambert, was. But instead of coming in, as he expected it was going to,—it banged against another door, and went into another room; and,—after a moment or two had elapsed—he heard the door of that room sharply closed.

“I suppose um,”—drawled Lambert to himself, taking up the day’s paper to give another glance over it,—“that that’s the doctor returned. Home early,—didn’t calculate upon—aw his being in—aw before Claire;—but um, I shan’t disturb him,—there’s no hurry.”

So,—by strange coincidence,—Lambert Islay lounged by the fire in one room, and Marcus Sinclair bent his head over books of medical research, in another. The former did not think it worth his while to disturb the latter, but the latter would certainly have thought it worth his while to have disturbed the former, *if* he had been aware of the former’s presence in his house. But, he was not aware of it; and so, as fate would have it, those two men sat for some time occupied in their different ways, in those two adjacent rooms,—with nothing but an inside wall between them.

CHAPTER XXX.

CLAIRE'S DECISION.

“ You mean, then, Marc, that it is against your will, that I should go ? ”

“ No, I don’t say that,—but, what I want you to understand is—that, in taking this step, you virtually subject yourself to . . . ”

“ Yes, I know what you are going to say,—I subject myself to being misunderstood. People will think I am returning to Islay Court, not only for the sake of seeing Father once again, but also to make up to him at the last, that he may—O Marc,—I hate saying it,—you know I don’t want money or possessions, or anything,—Beatrice can have all,—*that isn’t* what I want to go back for.”

She stopped, too vehement and torn asunder by conflicting emotions, to go on any further.

Her brother, however, helped her, by taking up the broken thread.

"Yes, Claire,—*I* know this, and *you* know this,"—he said gravely,—“and we know it to be true, but—of course, everyone else will think the most likely thing. They will . . .”

“Does it matter what *they* think,—or *anyone* thinks?” broke in she, passionately.

Her brother paused a moment before he answered; then, he said slowly—

“No, in point of fact, it *doesn't* matter in the least, Claire, if the decision rested with the idea of what outsiders would say. But, you see, this is—as it were—only the beginning of the misunderstanding; the worst part for you is—that what you don't want, but what people surmise that you do want, may actually become yours. And then, you know what that will entail?”

“Further difficulties and annoyances from Lambert,” rejoined Claire promptly, bringing her level brows low down over her eyes as she spoke,—“Hateful man,—why can't he leave me alone? I wonder why he doesn't beset Beatrice, it would save him a lot of trouble, and I am sure she doesn't hate him as I do. Indeed—I believe she rather likes him,—it never used to make her angry,

watching his fopperies and namby pamby habits, as it did me."

"But perhaps *he* doesn't like her," suggested Marc, thinking from what he remembered of Beatrice, that if anyone fancied her, they certainly would not have much inclination for the frank, warm-hearted Claire.

"Well, I wish he did,—I'm sure I don't want him to like me," said Claire strongly, —then added, with some reluctance, "but I suppose it's rather kind of him to have put himself out, and come here to fetch me back home, as Father wants to see me again. But oh!—how I wish there was a little more time to think and decide. You don't say —'no,' to my going, Marc?"

"No,"—said he shortly,—“I could say it tyrannically, but I can't authoritatively,—so, the decision must rest with yourself, Claire. But—I don't *wish* you to go, you understand."

It was scarcely fair of him to put it even as strongly as this, if he meant her to act entirely according to the dictates of her own will; for he knew that the direct expression of his wish was—as a rule—law to her.

But, though Lambert had performed his part most cleverly, and had succeeded in making a very plausible and urgent case out of James Islay's supposed wish to see Claire again before he died,—Marcus Sinclair felt, nevertheless, some very prominent misgivings about the truth of what his cousin said, and the amount of by-play that might not lie intertwined with all that he did say. Yet, there was nothing that he could honestly grasp hold of, which would entitle him to forbid a father's summons being obeyed. His own feeling in connection with the man, whom he did not regard in the light of a father,—he knew, with his strict sense of honour, he had no right to bring to bear upon Claire. And, therefore, notwithstanding the difficulty of the case for her to decide alone, he purposely withheld—as far as he could—his counsel.

The time in which to make the decision was short. Lambert was lounging in the next room, awaiting with some impatience, the result of this 'fools' counsel'—as he termed it—that Claire had insisted upon holding with her brother, before she would

decide which course to take. Whether to return to her home, as requested, and be subjected to misconceptions and, probably, further annoyances from Lambert,—but at the same time to be following out the promptings of her own heart: or, whether to do, as she instinctively knew her brother was wishing her to, and as—perhaps—selfish wisdom advised her,—to remain where she was, and hold herself, like him, as one entirely cut off and separated, from the old home and the old natural ties and affections. She had a strong tendency to decide for the former; but yet, she could not easily break through the old habit of, even, in this case, wishing to do as Marc counselled, and as he thought best. It was hard to go against his judgment in this matter, although—of late—she had found herself often questioning his unfailing wisdom.

Lambert had urged the necessity of haste. He had stated, that whatever was his cousin's decision, he, himself, would have to return to Islay Court, by a train leaving O—, that very evening. He could not delay; it was only at extreme inconvenience, and at the old

man's earnest insistence, that he had even left, for this short while. Most prudently, Lambert kept his own wishes and intentions entirely to himself. He seemed to see, that in the mention of them, he would weaken his own cause. He had appeared—as he had prognosticated—gifted with the right words and the right matter, at the right time. And, thus it was that, after the interview with Claire and her brother was over, he felt perfectly satisfied, with the impression he had made; and perfectly sure, also, that whatever opposition Marcus would put in his sister's way, that she would still be anxious to obey, what he had impressed upon her to be—her dying father's wish. Callous man as he was himself, Lambert was still subtle enough to know, that the surest way to gain a cause with a woman, is to play upon that woman's feelings. He had played, and he knew it—played with effect, upon Claire's. When she had left the room to make her decision, it was in a tumult of conflicting emotions; in which, sorrow for her father, and an earnest desire to make up to him for all her past neglect—lay uppermost.

—It had not been until about half-an-hour after her brother's return, and immediate seclusion in his consulting room,—that Claire, herself, had come back from her walk. Curiously, Jock had not heard his master's step; otherwise, he would have acquainted him, at once, with the news of the visitor, awaiting in the dining-room. But Jock happened to be watching a little later on for his mistress's return, and catching sight of her as she advanced up the drive, was at the door almost before she reached it, ready to tell her of the strange gentleman who had been within, waiting her return for the past hour and a half. Without Jock being able to recollect the name of the gentleman, though he explained that he had been here before some months ago,—Claire had jumped to the conclusion as to whom it would be. Rather to Jock's cultivated surprise, she had then walked straight—not to the dining-room where he had told her he had ensconced the visitor, but to the master's consulting room. And, still more to Jock's surprise, the master had been found in there, and, after the interchange of a few

hasty words, they had together made their way to the adjoining room.

All that Lambert had to say, did not expand itself over much time. He had hastened his usual drawl somehow, and left aside many of the affectations of speech, which generally made his communications rather lengthy concerns. He wished to impress the idea of haste. He was desirous of effecting this second move in favour of his cause, without further delay. He had an idea that, just now, it would be far less trouble, if he hurried over the different points in his arrangements,—in order, the sooner to bring them to a close. Besides, the show of haste would pay best. The less time Dr. Sinclair and his sister had for thought or reflection,—the better for him. Therefore—‘it was by that evening’s train,’ that he had to return, and therefore—it was that Claire’s father was represented as having but a very limited number of hours to live. What must be decided, must be decided at once.

—There had been a short silence between the brother and sister, after Marcus had

made his plain statement of his wish, in connection with Claire's decision. Claire had turned irresolutely to the window. A little while ago, what Marcus had just said, would have been quite enough for her. There would have been no hesitation as to which way she should act. But—now, it was different.

“Marc is not wide-minded or noble, where he has been injured,”—she thought to herself, gazing with great, troubled eyes, not out into the growing twilight, but deep into the land of thought,—“I should like someone to tell me what to do,—who knows what is the very best, and the most right. *He* doesn't know, because he only judges from a kind of personal view, and I think,—yes, I seem to feel that there is something safer and more to be depended upon as being right, than this. Ah!—that I had someone by me, whom I knew would know. I do not like acting for myself, and yet—to blindly follow Marc's judgment,—which I do not now in all things reverence and trust—would only make me unhappy,—I should despise and hate myself, I should . . .”

The train of her thoughts was being interrupted by a call from Lambert, coming from the next room. It was her name, he was impatiently uttering.

"Do go for me, Marc,"—she said beseechingly, turning to her brother,—“I must have just one moment more to decide. I will come in a minute,—tell him.”

Dr. Sinclair went to the door, but before he touched it, he turned round again and came towards her.

“Claire,” he said in a low, strained voice, “don’t think of me,—do as you in your heart think right,—you are,—yes, you must be a better judge in this, than I can possibly be.”

And then he left the room and went to Lambert. He was not a noble man, but he had a fine nature in which lay strong strivings after nobility.

“Um,—aw,—what a time she is taking,” remarked Lambert, yawning genteelly as his cousin entered the room, “why, in Heaven’s name, can’t er, she um say—yes, or no,—and have—aw done with it.”

As he spoke he rose from his seat.

“There are difficulties in the case,” said Dr. Sinclair shortly.

“I suppose um—you see more than—er she does,” remarked Lambert casually.

“Men generally see further than women,—or, at least, they think they do,” answered the other blankly, turning his back on his cousin, as he spoke.

“Well—um time’s short on this—er occasion,” began Lambert again dryly, glancing at the clock on the mantelpiece; “twenty minutes to six,—ah!—the—er train I am going to catch leaves O,—Midland, at eight, and I have um to get round and have—aw dinner at the ‘Grand,’ before then.”

Dr. Sinclair gave no answer.

But, Lambert had waited long enough; he must keep up his connection with haste. So, he made a move for the door.

“Claire,” he called,—still inside the room, but raising his intonation.

“She will be here in a minute,” muttered Dr. Sinclair gruffly, “it’s no good hurrying her.”

“It’s the old man’s—er feelings, I’m thinking of,—not—aw hers,” drawled Lam-

bert, pulling at his moustache with one hand, and gently surveying the rings on the fingers of the other, "it—um would be—er, you know, a nuisance, if he should—aw just go off his . . . "

"Nuisance for whom,—you or her ?" broke in Sinclair fiercely ; "you've got something behind all this, Lambert, or you wouldn't take so much interest in it. Harping on the old idea, which you had the insolence to propose, some months ago, eh ?"

Marcus Sinclair did not intend letting his suspicions get the better of him ; but, something in Lambert's lazy, affected drawl, caused him to lose mastery over himself. He felt convinced that there was some selfish motive lying beneath all this apparent indolent good-nature ; and yet, he felt, in a way, debarred from making a plain statement of what it was.

Lambert turned and looked closely at him, with—seemingly—unfeigned surprise.

"What—um aw—are you talking about, my dear—er fellow ?" he asked, in a voice that expressed much interest in his own question.

At this moment, Claire entered.

“I have decided now,” she said, addressing both her brother and Lambert. “If Father wishes to see me again, and has asked Lambert to come here and tell me so, then—it is my wish to return. But . . .”

She hesitated, and drew a step nearer her cousin.

“But,”—speaking pointedly to him—“are you sure that it *is* his wish,—for, he told me before I left home that he would never see me again. And Beatrice . . . Beatrice said nothing about his changing towards me, in her letter. What has made him change now?”

The simplicity of her question, and the steady, penetrating gaze of her eyes, as she sought—as it were—to draw out the truth from him, gave Lambert a certain feeling of uncomfortableness. But, he hid it well beneath his usual, easy composure.

“Um aw—can’t account for changes,” he said; “he was quite in a delirium about your—er return some hours—aw before I left,—nothing would quiet him, but my—um promise to start directly to—er fetch you.

But—of course—er, you can leave him—um alone, if you like."

Claire looked at her brother.

"Marc, I'm going," she said.

"Very well," he answered, not moving, and his face expressing nothing, "there's not much time. But, you must put a few of your things together,—you can have my small portmanteau, if you like."

And that was all, he said to her,—one way, or the other.

When she had left the room, he turned to Lambert, and asked a few particulars in reference to the trains,—as to whether he had to return to the hotel previous to starting,—and a few other questions to do with his arrangements. He found that Lambert had to return to the 'Grand,' that he purposed driving straight there, and that he had ordered the hansom which had brought him here, to be at Dr. Sinclair's gate again, at six.

"Claire may as well go—aw with me, now," Lambert remarked in the same breath as he asked for his coat and hat to be brought, "she won't mind—er waiting out-

side the hotel, or—um coming inside with me and having . . . ”

“ I shall take her to the station, myself,” interrupted Dr. Sinclair shortly, “ it’s only half-an-hour’s drive from here, and there’s no necessity for her to tire herself, by starting before time.”

“ As you—um like,” drawled Lambert carelessly, “ only I thought”—with a sneer, —“ you doctors were generally—aw sparing, —you know, of spare time. But perhaps,” —giving a look round the small room,—“ *you* can afford to be different.”

Sinclair saw the look, and felt the sneer; but they fell lightly upon him. There are some things coming from some people, that are beneath notice.

There were a few more words interchanged between the two men, relevant to the intended journey, and then—still keeping to his show of haste—Lambert Islay left the house.

He left with a more convinced notion of his own cleverness, and a more thorough satisfaction with his own self, than even his wont. And even the drawback of not then

and there taking Claire with him, was only very slight, when he compared it to all that he had gained. That very night, whilst travelling up with her, he would plead his suit,—he would charm her with his most sweet-sounding words,—he would play upon her feelings with a power, before which she would give way. He would try his old tactic of taking things for granted,—tell her that he had told her father, he was already engaged to her,—that it was upon that footing that she re-entered her home,—and that it was in that light that she must regard herself, while she remained there. The surprise, and the helplessness of her position,—he trusted, would serve to make her accept, with some tranquillity, the novelty of what he acquainted her with,—if, indeed, she were not overcome by the honour he did her, by engaging himself to her. For,—Lambert Islay had a great idea of his own attractiveness; and, though he knew Claire to be self-willed, and not particularly inclined to accept his overtures,—he yet thought, with the pride that some men have, that he had only to urge his suit, and it would be accepted. He judged all

women according to one idea, and classed Claire in the same category with the many whom—simply with the asking—yielded to his advances. Thus, he looked forward to some storm, some fire, some—perhaps—deluges of tears, and futile expressions of regret at the step taken ; and, then, a suitable and pleasing surrender. Truly—Lambert Islay, fine gentleman of good birth and handsome exterior, lived in a grade of thought and feeling, below which it would have been difficult for any—calling themselves ‘men’—to have sunk !

Upstairs, in her room, Claire went about collecting a few necessaries together. She felt in a kind of semi-stupefaction,—knowing what she was doing, and hastily and methodically doing what she had to do,—but, still, so engaged with one thought, that nothing was real except the existence of that one thought.

She had Marc’s small portmanteau on the floor,—she was stooping down to put things into it,—her things ;—what had she got his portmanteau there for,—and what was she putting her things in it for ? She was going

to leave him, to go back to her home; she was going to do what, time after time, she had affirmed she would never do; she was going to set her judgment against his judgment, her wish against his wish, her will against his will. Why shouldn't she? He wasn't always right, his notions were not always correct, or his wisdom always wise. He was hard-hearted, narrow, limited in sympathy and charity of feeling,—why then should she follow out his ideas, or be influenced by his wishes?

Her father was ill,—dying, and had sent to summon her home,—Marc didn't wish her to obey this summons. He *would* look at the misunderstandings that would arise,—he considered the disagreeableness to herself, that it would entail;—but, surely, Marc was a hard, calculating man, to put these things in a foremost place.

Yet,—yet, Marc wasn't *really* hard, or *really* unforgiving; it was only that he liked to appear so. He was a wise, true, good man,—she always used to think he was,—why didn't she think so now? Why didn't she just yield to his judgment now? Why

was she now closing up his portmanteau, with her things in it, and calling out to know where the key was? Ah!—she was right,—he was wrong; she would only stay away just a very few days,—a very few,—but it was right for her to go,—her father was dying,—he wanted her.

Downstairs, Dr. Sinclair had shut himself in his consulting-room. He was occupied; writing out orders, making notes from his call book, drawing out prescriptions, and—at intervals—calling Jock in to attend to certain orders and commissions, he had to give. Dr. Sinclair's face was white and set, but not more so than it often was, when his mind was preoccupied. His voice was strong and deep, and his tread, firm; whatever he thought of Claire's decision, and however much it was against his wish, he was not showing himself much affected by it, either one way or the other. He had much to do, very much,—in a short time; he must do it, there were no moments to spare for reflection;—afterwards, perhaps, he could think of what was now happening.

He remembered things that Claire forgot,

—locked up her portmanteau for her,—strapped her cloak, rug and umbrella together,—ordered in a good heavy meal, not for her only, but for both of them,—insisted upon her eating, and, himself, ate well. He was more communicative than usual, talked of many things, commented upon many things, was quite—for him—loquacious.

But, upon *the* one thing, he was mute; *the* thing upon which both he and Claire were burning to speak. And she—too—felt her tongue tied. She tried, as she choked down her food, to get out a few words of regret,—to ask a few words of advice,—to express a little of all she feared, and all she dreaded in this coming journey, that was every moment drawing nearer, and which had to be made with Lambert, and with Lambert alone. But she could not:—every time she looked at Marc, her eyes filled with tears; every time she opened her mouth to speak to him, her tongue refused to move. What could she do,—what could she say? He was so gentle, so kind to her; and yet, she was going direct against his wish. And, the few minutes they had together were fast

slipping by, and soon the chance of speaking would be gone. Oh!—what was it, that was making her so different from her usual self? What would Marc think of her?

At twenty minutes past seven, the cab, which Jock had been sent to order, arrived. They were quite ready for it,—she and Marc,—waiting,—wondering why it didn't come sooner.

She got in silently, and he,—after putting her small amount of luggage on to the seat opposite, and telling the driver where to drive,—got in too, and seated himself beside her. She noticed he had put his thick coat on, and had stuffed a comforter and a cap into his pocket. She thought it strange of him to have taken this precaution,—the night was not cold, and he never wrapped himself up, unless he were taking a night drive in the open air.

He asked her a few disjointed questions, as to whether she had remembered this or that, and she replied in the affirmative. That was all;—she sat back in her seat with burning cheeks and drooping lips, wondering why she still went on, wondering

why Marc still sat by her, intent upon looking at memorandums and papers, and not—seemingly—thinking of her, at all.

They had entered the city of O—; the gas shone in on their faces, lighting up the flush on hers and the pallor on his. The speed of the horse seemed to be slackening as they passed through some of those side streets, that led more directly to the Midland station.

Dr. Sinclair took out his watch, and looked at it.

“ We don’t want to have long to wait, when we get there, do we, Claire? ” he said, hesitating whether he should hasten the driver, or no.

As he spoke, he looked at her. Something in the mute pleading of her eyes, touched him; and, laying his hand on hers, he said—

“ Poor little sister,—it will be all right, dear; I will come and fetch you again.”

Ah!—if he had only just said that an hour ago! How much less distressing it would all have been to her. But—he had been waiting for her to speak, and she—had been waiting for him.

"O Marc,"—she said wretchedly; and as she spoke they turned up the last short street leading to the station,—“what shall I do—what can I do, all this long journey with Lambert,—alone,—I do so hate him, and oh!—shall I go?—Are you *very* angry with me?”

Angry with her?—No. He thought her a brave, plucky little creature,—though she was doing what he didn't wish her to.

Close alongside their cab, passed a hansom. It flashed by quickly; but both looked up, as if by instinct when it passed, and both saw—the form and face of Lambert Islay in it.

Claire shivered. She had been leaning against her brother, and was clasping one of his hands tight, in both hers.

“Marc—!” she exclaimed, loosening her clasp, and clinging to him.

He bent his head close to hers.

“I am going with you as far as Ironbridge,”—he said,—“and, in six days time, I will be there again, to fetch you back.”

Now, Ironbridge was the one station before Leverly; and Leverly was the station for Islay Court.

Marcus Sinclair loved his own pride and resentment; but, he loved his sister better than either of these. He was neither going to let her go to Islay Court alone with Lambert, or return.

So, Lambert's calculations upon urging his suit with Claire, during the journey,—were frustrated.

CHAPTER XXXI.

A LONELY MAN.

IT was late in the evening of the day after Claire's return to Islay Court, that found the Rector of Abbeyslea, pacing the lower part of his Rectory library, deep in thought.

He looked thinner and paler than he did, when first he came to Abbeyslea ; the shadows on his face were more defined, the lines under his eyes more strongly marked, and the cheeks beneath them more sunken. It was not that the new Rector found his work too arduous, or that he was pining to be back again amongst his poorer brethren in some large city, and regretted the acceptance of the care of a Parish composed entirely of gentry. He was quite reconciled to his work and his lot,—he did not count it entirely as his own choice, or his own will in the matter. He had laid it in the Hands of Another, and that Other had given him of His Counsel.

Therefore, the new Rector of Abbseyslea was content to be where he was, and to do the work that was placed before him to do.

But Ambrose Liddon's life, though centred in his work, was not wholly encompassed by it. Lone, single man, as he appeared to be to all outsiders, he was yet bound very closely by a few, deep, and sacred ties,—without which, in all probability, his work would have lacked a something. There would not, perhaps, have been the whole-hearted and wide sympathy for all, in all conditions and in all states,—if the man of God had not first been bound and softened by some strong personal love and attachment. There would not have been that almost womanly tenderness and delicacy of feeling, intermixed with the more than usual man's strength of character,—if the man had not himself felt what the sweetness of that influence was.

It is sometimes thought, that the strong, earnest, God-fearing men,—who go forward to do their duty, regardless of their fellow-men's wonder and the world's sneers,—are, by the very devotion and intense fervour that

they put into their work, exempt from that human craving after personal affection and personal sympathy, that other men have. Yet, in truth, these very men are the ones to have the most passionate and devouring desires for close human sympathy. The coldness of their fellow-brethren, who will not own themselves as fellows, appals them: the contempt and misconception of the world, they live in, causes them at times to stand completely undone. At these hours, they commune with their God on high; but He, Who plants within the strong desires of human nature, knows that the creature below, craves for the human love as well as for the Divine Guidance and Strength. The Love of God hath in It, a tenderness and knowledge, of which only those who draw very close to It, can have any understanding.

The human bond which had served, under God's Guidance, to mould the soft and tender part of Ambrose Liddon's character,—was the bond of his mother's love. It was her sweetness which had softened a nature which might in its strength and power, have—otherwise—cultivated germs of hardness.

It was her love that encircled and surrounded the son, when—at times—he had seemed to stand alone, with no human creature near, to whom to open his heart. In the midst of his work, when failures would come quick and fast, and all lay around him, apparently, barren and unfruitful,—it was the thought of her tender sympathy, for what was affecting him, that would often lend him courage and fortitude. His nature was one that craved for love: for the Divine Love first, to satisfy the immortal desires of the soul within him; but for the close human love, secondly, to fill and rest in the home of his heart.

Before Ambrose Liddon came to Abbeyslea, he had always had his mother to live with him. She had been with him during those early years of his priesthood, when his fierce and eager spirit had, time after time, threatened to exhaust the feeble temple in which it dwelt. She had been by him during those hours of thick darkness, when the Devil had mightily assailed the still young and groping follower of Christ. She had laid her soft hand upon his aching brow,

when—after seasons of great spiritual conflict—he had lain back, scarcely knowing whether, in the power of his Master, he had conquered; or whether, through sheer physical weakness, he had failed. She had, by the sweetness of her voice and by the tenderness of her love, soothed, strengthened, softened him when—but for her—his too ardent zeal might have proved his enemy, and his very strength of will and purpose, his assailant. She had been to him all that a mother has need to be,—a tender, true, large-hearted woman; expanding the possibilities of his nature, not contracting them, and assisting him in the grand endeavours of his life,—not hindering him.

And this mother was to have joined her son at Abbeyslea Rectory, after he had settled himself in and made all ready for her. This had been the arrangement. The increasing delicacy of her health had made him very careful for her. He would not have her move with him, or be subjected to all the discomforts and risks that attend the direct removal from one place to another. He would go to his new living, prepare his

new home for her, do what she would have done for him as best he could for himself, and then—when all was ready, fetch her by easy stages to once more grace and beautify that home of his.

But—God did not will that this should be. The mother's devotion and love to her son, had done their work; what further there was to accomplish, was to be the privilege of another.

—The low, dark library of Abbeyslea Rectory was lit, not very brightly, by a shaded reading-lamp. There had been some attempt, in building this house some thirty or forty years ago, to build it in the old style, in order to make it a suitable looking residence for the presiding clergyman of an old Church. The endeavour had been, in some ways, successful; for, the comparatively new Rectory was not, either outside or inside, a modern-looking building. Perhaps, inside, the inconveniences and appearance of age, were more successfully designed than those that had been attempted on the outside. At least, so the two former Rectors of Abbeyslea had been heard to say, when they thought of

the various improvements that there might have been in the building of it, had it not been for the insertion of this antiquarian idea.

The library was a low, long room, lying two steps below the level of the other ground-floor rooms. The two windows in it, which did not extend down to the floor, had nevertheless the appearance of doing so, as—in looking out—their base seemed to rest right upon the green sward, that lay close outside. These two windows had been cut out rather close together, towards the upper end of the room, where the fireplace lay; and thus, the lower end of the long room always had the appearance of being in semi-twilight.

The new Rector of Abbeyslea liked both the size and the shape of his library. It suited him to have that lower half of the room. His writing-table he had placed near one of the windows; his armchair near the grate; his odds and ends close together, all in the upper part of the room; his books he had packed closely in the shelves, lining the walls of that upper end; his few articles of furniture he had crowded together in the same part.—The lower half of the room

was carpeted,—that was all. Furniture would have been in the way there; books would have been in the way there: for this part of his room, the Rector only used as a “pacing-ground.” Here it was that he loved to walk up and down, backwards and forwards, to and fro,—sometimes for hours together, lost in thought.

This evening, his pace was very slow. His footsteps seemed only just to drag themselves one after the other, as if they were almost too weary to move. Too weary to move, yet—moving on up and down, up and down.

The light from the lamp was not a strong one. The thin, spare figure looked only like a shadow, moving slowly along. As the clock struck eleven, however, Ambrose Liddon came unevenly towards the light,—drew a chair slowly out from the writing-table, and sat down upon it. As he did so, the light from the lamp fell full upon his face.

Ah!—the face told why the steps were weary, and why the slight figure was slighter. The face had passed through a refining fire,

which had again refined what had been fine before ; leavening what had been leaven before ; strengthening what was strong before. There was a look upon it, that had not been there when Ambrose Liddon had first come to Abbeyslea,—a look which had not been there, even a week ago. And yet, it was a look that that face would never again be without ; and which, no one looking at it now, would ever wish it to be without. It was a look that had been gained through much suffering, through much striving, through much prayer : without these, the look could not have been there.

Upon Ambrose Liddon's left arm, there was a broad band of crêpe. Before him, on the table, lay a pile of letters. Some of these letters were opened, and the writing upon them showed small and delicately formed. Close by the letters stood a large-sized portrait, framed in an oaken stand. And near to this again, lay a curl of soft grey hair, some trinkets, and a thin, plain gold ring.

Ambrose Liddon gazed for a long time, as in a dream, above the pile of half-opened

letters, and the portrait, and the little tokens that lay near it. His face was perfectly still, perfectly peaceful. If there had been agony of soul before, it must have passed away now ; if there had been strong striving before, there must be the victory that comes after strife now. For the look upon the face, was not a shadow,—but a light.

Slowly he lowered his eyes down, till they rested upon the portrait, which stood upon the table below him. As he did so, he let the hand that was supporting his chin, drop.

“ Mother—”

The word fell from his lips, perhaps unconsciously. It was uttered, not in grief, not in sorrow,—but, in triumph. The mother,—the one human heart and life which had, of all earthly things, been most dear to him,—God had taken. The one,—whilst others had many, he had had but one,—and God had taken it. Yet, the man of God uttered the name of her who had gone away, in triumph. Surely, at that moment, he had been allowed after much prayer, after much conflict to look, in some mysterious way, into the Glory of Death.

But the triumph could not last. The man, though a man of God, was but human; and, as he tenderly raised the picture close to his face, the hands that held it shook, and the lips that were pressed to it trembled.

“Mother—,” he said again, but this time the word came from him brokenly. A sense of his desolation and loneliness bore down upon him, bringing havoc again into the soul of the man, who had already fought long and hardly, and who had already tasted of the peace and quiet that comes after conflict.

He looked at the face before him, with eyes that were clouded. Yet, though he only saw indistinctly, he gazed upon it long and earnestly.

It was a face that was neither handsome nor comely; but yet, there was a beauty upon it, which neither handsomeness nor comeliness could give. In a softer, less-marked degree, it resembled his own face. There was the same broad, yet rather low, forehead; the same straight brows, the same tender mouth, tender without the cleverness that characterized his. But there, the resem-

blance ended. The cheeks were not so thin or sunken; the eyes were large; and the grey hair that was drawn off the broad brow, was waving and abundant. The beauty on the face was the beauty of soul that lay beneath the face; the beauty that made the son think that there was no beauty in all the world like his mother's beauty.

Slowly he placed the picture of the face that he should never again see on earth, down on the table. Slowly he moved his trembling hand to where the wedding ring, that he had drawn off the dead finger, lay,— touched it, and then let them pass to the curl of grey hair, lying close by. This he took up and placed in the palm of his other hand; stroking it softly, while it lay there.

A smile played upon his face while he stroked it. The touch of that hair was so real to him. When she had been with him, he had always loved to stroke her soft, waving hair; it had been one of his signs of endearment to the mother, who had been so much, and done so much for him, all his life.

Ah!—God!—but, what was he smiling for? All that had been, was passed—

He looked round the room, with the light of returning consciousness of what was, in his eye,—looked round and held his breath, and listened as he did so. There was no sound, save the sound of the flickering flames on the hearth; no sound, save that sound of stillness, that seems to come to the intent, listening ear.

Those moments of strange oblivion,—are they *worth* the agony of the return from them? Those drops from the phial of Nepenthe—*are they worth* the after-payment, demanded for them?—

Who can tell?

The man of God laid his arms on the table, and bowed his head down, until the face was buried in them. He did not move, he did not speak,—for, over his soul again was lowering the thick cloud, from whose darkness, he had not long arisen. What? is not one conflict enough? Must even a good man,—a man who has already striven and watched and prayed, more often and more earnestly, than other men,—must he again stoop for the tides of desolation to pass over him,—a second time? Aye,—question

not, only praise God, that He counts him strong enough and worthy enough, to combat with these waters, which have the power—in the passing—to make him a more perfect man, and a more meet man for the work which lies before him.

Does nearness to God, make the heart less human? Does it make the affection less deep, or the ties less strong? Does it bind the feelings within a compass, or curb the tender emotions within a limit? Does it spare the strife, or lessen the conflict?—Ah! no,—nearness to God, makes the heart tenderer, and binds what is bound on Earth closer;—only, all is raised as upon a High Altar, for the Honour and Glory of God.

Ambrose Liddon's one great earthly tie had been broken, and his one great earthly affection smitten:—what if in this lay a Purpose, without which the *full* power and sweetness of his nature, would have remained undisclosed and undeveloped?—What if the agony of grief were needed for the further raising of his soul, which had yet to pass through another darkness, under which if it

were not made thus two-fold strong, it might sink?

There are some deep, afflicting sorrows that come—as it were—to human eyes, very prematurely. They come when all is calm and peaceful; when all seems right and according to the Will of God; they come when and where—it seems—*least* needed. Man looks far in, to see the reason for it, and cannot: he looks behind, he looks before,—but nothing that he can see, nothing that he can feel, is able to explain the purpose of what has been suddenly, and—to all appearance—motivelessly sent. Why then, he questions, should he bow down in resignation to the, seemingly, hard Will of an Omnipotent? Why then should he continue to believe in the Loving-Kindness of a God, Who seemingly taketh a delight in giving pain?—Ah!—again,—it is the pride of man that is at fault. Can he see what the Almighty sees? Can he know what He knows? Can he rule as He rules, or divine as He divineth?—Certainly not. What then is man's pride when he questions God, and the dealings of God? Cannot he trust the

Alpha and the Omega, to know the good of His Own Will,—and the prospering of His Own Purpose? Cannot he—at each mysterious dealing—in faith give to Him all the more perfectly, the Honour due unto His Name, and the Worship due unto His Being?—Man has indeed to *know* himself and his own littleness, if he would raise himself to the power of—even in a small degree—knowing God and His Greatness.

Not many weeks after Ambrose Liddon had thus bowed his head low under God's affliction,—there was to come about a strange trial, in the trammels of which his soul would stagger.

And not many months later on, he would learn that upon the sacredness of the broken old ties, grow the living germs of new ones.

CHAPTER XXXII.

PRIDE OR LOVE?

IRONDRIDGE was a comparatively large station, lying, not in the centre of the small town of Irondridge, but on its outskirts. It was the station not only for Irondridge proper, but for the two outlying districts of Newston and Lutwich.

The village of Leverly lay at quarter of an hour's distance by train, from Irondridge; but, this had only a small country station, with a single platform, and on a single line.

It was about eleven o'clock in the morning of the fourth of November, that a tall man's figure, could be seen pacing up and down one of the platforms of Irondridge station. That man had been pacing there off and on, without much intermission, for the past two hours. If any one had been watching, they would have seen that he had at nine o'clock, arrived in by the express

from M—, on a further platform, had immediately crossed over to No. 4, where the West Branch trains ran in; and, upon this, the longest and the least serviced of the platforms, had begun his—seemingly—automatic to and fro movement. Twice during these two hours, he had addressed an official, upon certain particulars connected with the time table; and twice he had made a careful survey of the passengers alighting from the Branch line train. That was all,—for the rest of the time, he kept his hat well down over his eyes, his head bent on his chest, and continued his former regular movement up and down the limited space of the long platform.

The morning was dark and foggy, with no breeze stirring, and no break in the leaden clouds. The air was thick, so thick that it seemed, at times, to be raining fast; and yet, it was not raining, it was only that the air was dense. The ends of the platform, towards which the tall figure repeatedly strode, were invisible from the covered central part of the station; and thus the figure had the curious appearance of, after a

certain distance, disappearing into and again emerging from—nothing. The platform had apparently ended, and the figure apparently gone; but yet, the latter steadily reappeared again, in order, it seemed, to go through exactly the same delusive process at the other end.

Perhaps few, who had known Marcus Sinclair *Islay* as a boy, or as a very young man,—would have recognised him again now. The figure which had been tall, had never given evidence of being, also, broad and muscular, as it now was. The hair that had been thick and black, was thick still, but too much sprinkled with grey, to be called black. And the heavy, overhanging moustache he now had, so hid the moody, protesting mouth, as to very much have altered the expression of the whole face. The melancholy eyes and dark arched eyebrows, were the same; but the hat had been brought down so low upon them, that the resemblance here would have been passed over, because—not seen. At a little distance off, also, he would have been taken for a good-looking man of forty or forty-five,

rather than one of barely thirty-one years. Dr. Sinclair was particularly anxious *not* to be recognised by any who had formerly known him in those parts; and it was very probable by the decided change, or—rather—development of, what he had been, that his wish would be granted. Also,—as a young man, he had not been very much known round about Leverly and Irondridge, it having been generally at his father's town residence that he had spent his vacations, during college life. Islay Court had been more the scene of his child and early boyhood, when his mother was alive,—and, as such, he would be best remembered.

In the left breast pocket of Dr. Sinclair's coat, lay a letter; which he every now and again, when right at the far end of the platform, laid his hand upon and brought out,—unfolded—and read. The contents of the letter were the following :

“ MARC.

“ Come, Thursday. Not seen Father yet; he could not have wanted me. Lambert is — (the word was scratched out, written

over again, and again scratched out,—and nothing of a word discernible). Have not dared to write. Forgive me.

“Yours,

“CLAIRE.

“If I don’t meet you at Irondridge, it’s because I can’t.”

This was the letter that Dr. Sinclair had received by the mid-day post of yesterday. And this was the first news he had had of Claire, since he had last seen her at Irondridge, seven days ago. Then he had waited until the train, bearing her and Lambert to Leverly, had slowly moved out of the station; and he knew that, as far as he could, he had seen her safely to within a few miles of her father’s house. And knowing this, he had returned to Abbeyslea, fairly easy in his mind about her, and more quiet and satisfied about the decision that she had come to, than he had yet been.

He did not expect to receive a line from her the next day; but, he did the day after. She had promised to write, if not fully, at all events, a few words relative to herself,

and those around her. But no letter, or line, came. It was so unlike her, even if seriously and continuously engaged, not to fulfil her word; not to communicate with him, whom she knew was waiting with daily,—hourly anxiety, to hear of, from, and about her.

When the sixth morning dawned and still there was no news, Dr. Sinclair determined as soon as he could complete his arrangements and transfer his engagements, to take the evening express to M—, and from thence on to Ironbridge. By some means or another, he must get to know what was meant by this silence. He did not make up his mind as to his course of procedure when he got there, but go he would. However, at noon that very day had arrived this short, guarded letter, which had the effect of making him still further hasten his arrangements; in order to start by an earlier train, which would bring him into Ironbridge by nine the next morning. And, by that train, he had two hours ago arrived.

Before he got to his journey's end, he could put off the thought of what he should do, if Claire did not—during the course of

the morning—arrive in by one of the three trains, timed from Leverly. He could put it off by uneasily convincing himself, of the certainty of her arrival, and of the unlikely possibility there was, of her not being able to arrive. But, after two hours had gone by, and two trains from Leverly had come in,—and thus two chances of her coming gone,—Dr. Sinclair turned and forcibly faced the question of what he should do, providing after the last of the three morning trains should arrive in, and she, not be there. The next train from Leverly, after these, was not timed till 4 p.m. It would be impossible to go on waiting for the chance of her coming in by this one, or—even—by the later one, due at 7.15. Those few, constrained words in her letter, all too sufficiently showed that, she was not able to act entirely according to her own will,—that all was not, as it should be with her.

What then should Dr. Sinclair do? He could not depend upon the unlikely possibility of receiving a telegram, or some kind of communication by messenger, or otherwise, from her. And he would not remain

at Irondridge station one moment after that 12.0 train came in,—coming as he now felt convinced it would,—without her. Neither would he delay taking immediate means to find out what was the cause, not only of her inability to leave her father's house, but also for the restraint in which she had evidently been all the while, kept. Nor would he be debarred from both seeing and speaking to her. These decisions were easy enough to arrive at,—but, what next?

Ah! what next? If Marcus Sinclair meant to advance further, and settle in his mind how he was going to carry out what he meant to do, he would have—in the first place—to become aware of a great sacrifice of self, that he would have to make. For, the pride that he had cherished and guarded for now nearly eight years, would have to be lowered. The estrangement that was so bitter, but which had—in a sense—been almost gloried in, would have to be set at nought. The deep vow that he would never again enter his father's house, or tread near his father's domains, would have to be broken. The enmity with his kith and kin,

which he had striven to maintain in his heart to be a lawful one, would have to be—for the time—set aside.

Did Marcus Sinclair love his sister well enough to sacrifice all this for her sake? Did he hold her security worth his humility; or, her extrication from difficulty and perhaps wretchedness, worth his resignation of what he meant to be a life-long will and purpose? Ah! why should he surrender so much for her sake? Had she not, by her own will and choice, laid herself open to both trouble and annoyance? Had she not, though knowing his will, gone direct against it? Why should he now, at the great sacrifice to himself, lend her a helping hand? Why should he lower his pride and break his vow, to aid her in her straits, when she had wilfully entangled herself in them?

Dr. Sinclair was high-minded enough to be heartily ashamed of some of the thoughts, that would chase themselves through his brain. He did not mean them to come, he did not even acknowledge them; but, somehow, they came, and tried all they could to get entertained. Fortunately the Devil does

not get all his own way in this transfer of thought. His thoughts are worldly wise and specious enough to tempt; but, sometimes, there is a certain horrid repulsion about them, which doesn't savour for their duration. They look rather ugly by the side of the other kind of thoughts, which also strive to get entertained.

“What?” muttered Dr. Sinclair to himself, as—passing beneath the station clock—he saw it stood at the hour of noon, “are myself and my purposes and my, even, long-held prejudices, so valuable, that I can, for their sake, think of leaving her,—my own loyal little sister in the hands of—Bah!—what am I made of that I should hesitate? It is a nasty draught, that is all,—I have administered many to others in my life, and yet—do I shrink from drinking deep, myself?—There is only one thing to do, and there can be no alternative, but a coward's alternative, and *that*—is not mine.”

The Branch line train arrived in; but, as Dr. Sinclair fully expected, there was no sign of Claire in it. Indeed, so convinced had he felt that she would not come, that,

before that train drew up at the platform, he had already taken his ticket for the next going to Leverly. And, fortunately, this happened to start, within a short time of the arrival in of the other.

At Leverly, the fog seemed denser than it had been at Irondridge. As Dr. Sinclair alighted on the single platform, gave up his ticket, and deposited his small bag in the care of the station-master,—he was glad of the thick cover of that fog. His nerves were in a high-wrought state; he fancied that the station-master and the two or three passengers, who got out at the same time as he did,—were staring at him, and recognising who he was. He imagined his own voice sounded familiar and boyish, as it used to; and that, even if he were not known by his appearance, he would be by his voice.

But, neither the station-master nor the passengers were interested in him; though they all knew that at Islay Court, two miles off, the rich, arrogant old lawyer, James Islay, lay dying. It had been given out plainly enough years ago, that the only son had been disinherited, and that a vow had

been taken that he should never again, place a step within his father's grounds. There had been, at the time, a feeling in favour of the injured son,—a natural feeling, as the tyrannical father was both disliked and feared, by all who knew him;—but, as nothing had transvened to keep the feeling alive, it had died out. Even now, at this juncture of the old man's illness, people seemed almost to have forgotten the fact of the son's existence; or, at least, regarded any surmises concerning him, as useless.

Islay Court lay at two miles distance from Leverly station. The two ways that led to it, seemed perfectly familiar to Dr. Sinclair, so he chose the shortest,—the course which, for part of the distance, lay over moor or waste land.

Before he passed off the road on to this moorland, he stopped a moment to turn up the collar of his coat, and to draw his hat still further over his eyes. He did it for a double reason;—the fog was thicker over the open moor land, than it was on the road, and the more he enveloped his face, the less likelihood there was of his being recognized,

if it should so chance that he should meet anyone.

“At no other time would it have struck so hard,” thought he, with a certain fierce bitterness, as—with rapid strides—he started on, “to lick the dust *now*,—to pander *now*,—good Heavens, why am I forced to this? Before,—after,—any time but now, when he is at death’s door, for the world to say that I am returning,—seeking to make peace for the sake of getting what he leaves. Ah! —for money’s sake, for money’s sake,—no, I say it is *not* for money’s or for peace’s sake,—it’s for Claire, Claire’s sake,—only for hers.”

Yet still, the monotonous monologue, “for money’s sake,—for money’s sake,” drummed through his ears. It was false,—false as hell itself; but hell’s powers seemed to be empowering it with the forcible reiteration of truth.

“For money’s sake,”—in dismayed thought, he seemed to see himself, in his father’s death room, hating the man who lay stricken and helpless, hating him,—yet, with his own hand forcing him, with horrid, avaricious

pleasure, to sign his name, to affix his seal, to a new—*What?*—What had he to do with wills or signatures? they were nothing to him. He was licking the dust for Claire's sake, not for his own. For Claire's;—aye, —what was happening to her,—where was she,—what was she doing? What was the meaning of that letter, lying in his breast pocket? What did it point to? What did it unfold?—Lambert's whole visit and story, had been made for his own personal use and pleasure. Merely a scheme devised, for getting Claire away from his—Marcus's—care, in order to—? Ah! Dr. Sinclair had been right. The vague suspicions he had cherished, but which he had striven to crush, should have furnished him with that authority, which he had refrained from exercising. He should have strained at the gnat; he should have caught hold of, and magnified the misgiving. But,—he hadn't; what was done, was done; and both he and Claire must suffer for it.

How long the way over the moor seemed! How thick and white the air! “For money's sake.—” If anyone passed him now, could

he distinguish their features, or they—his? If,—if,—what was he thinking of,—“for money’s sake ? ”—no, it was for Claire’s sake, and—for his own ; to redeem what he had lost, to make amends for the mistake he had made.

Lambert,—how should he meet Lambert ? A certain sense of brute pleasure, made the blood rush hotly to his brain, and tingled every high-strung nerve, as he thought of his own muscular strength, and the puny coxcombry, against which it might be pitted. Lambert should answer for his deceit ; he should pay for the lies that had fallen so glibly from his tongue ; and aye—for more still, for the steps that those lies were entailing,—for the sacrifices, they were costing.

How much denser would the fog grow,—how much further would the moor stretch ? If Lambert—

Either the mist had blinded Dr. Sinclair’s eyes and numbed his ears, or else he was too lost in his delirium of thought, to be aware of things external. As the name, Lambert, with its accompanying thought in connection

with him, again crossed his fevered mind,—he felt himself come into sharp contact with something. And, at the same time, his ears were smitten by the ugly sound of a deep and elongated oath.

The “something” he had come into concussion with, was evidently a man, as only these productions of nature are high-born and high-privileged enough, to deal in these things.

The man must have been slight and less muscular than Dr. Sinclair, for the sudden, sharp contact with the latter, had sent him staggering several paces backward.

Dr. Sinclair would have moved on, with a muttered apology; but, something in the build of the staggering figure, and something in the intonation of that elongated curse,—struck him as familiar. Setting his teeth and lowering his head well down upon his chest, he passed close up against the man, whose form and voice,—even in the incognitancy of the moment—were not, he thought, unknown to him.

His stride was so rapid and his face so low bent, that even if the man's eyes had

not been so bleared, or his brain so besotted,—the white denseness of the fog might have been the means of preventing Lambert Islay from recognising, the last man he wished to come across at that moment. But not so, Marcus Sinclair Islay. With the keenness of suspicion and dark presentiment,—each sharpening the other—he saw the handsome outline of his cousin's face, and knew the easy, *nonchalant* grace of his cousin's figure.

Long afterwards, when the events of that day were being reckoned as things of the past, gone and done for, for ever,—Dr. Sinclair marvelled and marvelled again, at the iron cast of will that was granted him, in the foul temptation of those dark moments. For,—it was with a murderer's desire for blood, that he felt his eyes glittering upon the unwitting Lambert. It was with the mad infatuation of fury, that he clenched his fists, and—though driven onward by the strange volition that, seemingly, forced him against his direct intention,—made him lift them high in the action of striking. But, he did not even turn; the impelling forward motion, though to himself it seemed against

his will, was yet stronger than the impelling backward motion.

Was it only a cool, calculating wisdom, which led him to see that, in the fact of Lambert's being away from the house, disappeared the greatest difficulty he had reckoned upon, in his attempt to see Claire? Was it the wild hope that, in achieving his design of entering his father's house, the absence of Lambert would enable him to accomplish his purpose so swiftly and bare-facedly, that none—except his two sisters—would ever know of his humbled pride and broken vow? Was it the calm, reflecting knowledge that, that full man's strength which was his right man's glory, would be as a shame and a dishonour to him, if used against what he knew to be a weaker and less able strength?

Hardly. Dr. Sinclair was a man of quick moods and passions, not one of cool and wise calculations. On less occasions and on smaller provocations, in time past,—he had said and done things, which calmer moments caused him to regret. The rousing of the lion within him, was generally the signal,

not for careful reflection, but for hasty and unwise action.

Therefore, it was, that Dr. Sinclair, up to a certain period in his life, looked back upon and regarded with unfeigned wonder, the power of that force which led him on, away from the fell temptation that assailed him. Led him on straight through the lodge gates of his father's grounds, up the long drive,—never stopping, never pausing,—until he reached the large porchway of the house. And then,—still without stop or hesitation,—had made him lay his hand on the bell, and ring it.

That morning the bell had been muffled. James Islay was worse; the doctors gave small hopes of his living through the day.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

IMPELLED ON.

“DR. SINCLAIR.”

Beatrice Islay was seated in her father's library, looking over some papers at his writing table,—when her brother's name was announced.

She did not recognise it as his name, neither at the first moment in the casual glance she gave the stranger, did it dawn upon her that there was anything familiar, in the stranger's appearance. She thought it was one of the new doctors arrived, which that morning had been telegraphed for, and—as such—with a formal bow, she rose to acknowledge his entrance.

The face of Beatrice Islay was even paler, than its wont; and, as the white thick fog outside pierced in through the windows, it seemed, curiously, to sharpen the keen outline of her features, into the hardness of

sculptured marble. It was the cold, moveless face of a statue, that Marcus Sinclair looked upon, and recognised to be that of his eldest sister. Was it with any feelings of emotion, that he regarded her,—or, was it with any quickened thoughts that he proceeded, without any loss of time, to address her?—None could tell, for—his face, like hers, had an iron mask upon it.

“Beatrice,”—he said, advancing with that heavy, firm tread of his, which so belied the state of inward perturbation and indecision, in which he often laboured.

Still she did not, or would not, know him; though, she gave a start at the sound of his deep voice.

“Beatrice,”—he said again, and this time there was an accent of sternness in his tones,—“where is Claire?”

He was standing looking down upon her, with a fixedness before which, though she kept her eyes with a kind of blank stare on his face, made the colour mount with a sudden flush to her pale brow. Yet, with the inherent pride and iciness of manner, which was hers at all times and in all places,

she drew back a pace or two; and, then, in the harsh tones of a monitor, and entirely ignoring his question, demanded —

“Who gave you leave to enter this house?”

It was a sisterly and womanly question, made in a sisterly and womanly voice! Probably though, Beatrice Islay thought it her right to exercise her father's authority and harshness upon this disinherited offender. Or, perhaps,—in the suddenness of the moment, she felt driven to bay by the strange thought and possibility, which had flashed across her mind. Could it be that, amongst other of the physicians telegraphed for, her own brother—and her father's unrecognised son—happened to be of the number?

But Marcus Sinclair, not knowing of the further advice that had been called in, could not grasp the still greater peculiarity of his position. All he knew and all he heard were, the harshness of Beatrice's tones and the peremptoriness of her demand.

“That is no concern of yours,” he said, with an *hauteur* equal to her own, “I shall

be obliged if you will answer *my* question,—where is Claire?—she was to have met me at Irondridge this morning,—why didn't she?"

A look of surprise crossed Beatrice Islay's face, at the evident news Dr. Sinclair had given her.

"She was not wanted here,—she might have gone," she said, guardedly.

"Where is she now?" he asked, the shadow on his face darkening.

"I do not know,"—she said, looking straight at him, with cold steel eyes, as she spoke.

His anger rose.

"What do you mean?" he said, grasping hold, almost roughly, of one of her delicate wrists.

Against her will, the pale, fair woman had to explain her meaning.

"She came here without being asked, and she will leave, I suppose, when it suits her own, or Lambert's, plans,"—she said acidly,—"it is nothing to me, where she is at this present moment."

Then, as with a breath of relief he loosened

hold of her, she added,—moving towards the bell on the right hand side of the fire-place, as she spoke —

“ It is a dishonourable act of yours, to have taken advantage of—*his* state, and forced your entrance here,—even, with the excuse of being anxious for Claire's return. It would also be dishonourable of me, not to do as *he* would do, therefore,—on his authority, I must beg that you leave this house immediately. Claire can follow. . . .”

“ Thank you,”—he broke in hoarsely, placing himself in between her and the bell, —“ but, by my own authority and by my own will,—I do not leave, until I take Claire with me.”

For a moment, there was silence between them. He waited for her to offer to fetch Claire, and she—as she surveyed the dark, muscular strength of his face—paused to consider, the wording of her next shaft.

The position, in which they stood, was curious. They had not seen each other for nearly eight years; they were knit by one of the closest bonds of relationship; yet, at the same time, they were separated by a wide

and mutually made barrier. Thus, the brother and sister were meeting on strangers' terms; with a stranger's absence of emotion, and with a stranger's control of speech.

She spoke again, before he did.

“It is both unseemly and, as I said before, dishonourable, that you should be here in this house,” — she said with some anger in her cold, distinct tones, — “while he lies upstairs, breathing away his last few hours. If he knew you were here,—if he could be conscious—enough to know you were here, he would . . .”

“Curse me from his doors, again,” — finished Dr. Sinclair, folding his arms as he spoke, — “and I, Beatrice, would do the same as I am doing now,—*refuse* to leave the house until I took Claire with me. There would be no difference.”

Then, changing his tones somewhat, he added —

“I shall be glad if you will fetch Claire down to me at once. Of course, if you refuse to make her aware of my presence, then I shall take matters into my own hands, and go and find . . .”

"You misunderstand,"—interrupted Beatrice, and—for the first time—her thin-cut lips trembled and her voice broke,—“I have nothing to do with Claire. She is . . . she is under Lambert's care.”

“His care? *Why* under his care?” asked Dr. Sinclair sharply.

Beatrice took a step towards her father's writing-table; and, in doing so, turned her face away from his.

“I suppose you know that she is . . . engaged to him,”—she said, marking the word “engaged” with extreme bitterness.

An exclamation of disgust broke from his lips.

“Engaged?—*no*,”—he thundered,—“you are fooling me, Beatrice. If Lambert were the last man on earth, Claire wouldn't engage herself to him.—What is the meaning of this mystery about . . .”

“False?—?” interrupted she, suddenly facing him, with eyes no longer cold, but flashing, and the whole statue-face convulsed,—“false?—Ah!—I might have known,—I might have believed her, and—and saved myself from . . .”

But Marcus Sinclair did not stay to note,

either the strange emotion shown, or the peculiar double part there was being played. He seemed to see again the smooth, handsome face of Lambert, with the bleared eyes and sottish expression. This is how he last saw him. This is how he might, at any moment, return.

He made a movement towards the door.

“As you refuse to . . .” he began.

“I will see if she is able to—see you,” Beatrice said, hastily passing him,—“if Lambert . . .”

“Lambert is out,”—muttered he, impatiently, as she hesitated.

But, she shook her head. She did not believe him.

“He never leaves the house,”—she said, —“he is too clever not to do what he wants to. I wonder he hasn’t heard . . .”

“He is out at this moment,”—repeated Dr. Sinclair, in exasperated tones,—“and while he is out, I take Claire from this house, for ever. The child has been deceived,—played upon,—befooled.”

Beatrice stood still immovable, at the closed door, with her fingers just touching the handle. There was a strange look of

triumph mingled with contempt on her face.

His patience was well-nigh exhausted.

"I give you five minutes, Beatrice,"—he said, opening the door,—“If you do not return with her then, I shall leave this room, and look for her, myself.”

Then, she moved. With her proud head slightly lowered, and her footsteps gliding as if in stealth,—she made her way across the hall,—not towards the wide, open staircase, leading to the *suite* of rooms just above,—but towards a narrow staircase, lying to the left and farthest end of the large hall.

Almost unconscious of what he was doing, Marcus Sinclair watched the direction she took. Yet, at that moment, he was neither thinking of her, nor of Claire. He was bitterly chewing the cuds of his own humiliation. He was feeling suffocated by the sense of his own presence in the house, he had long vowed he would never again enter. Yet, by his own voluntary will he was there, and by his own voluntary will he was forcing himself to stay there,—until the purpose, for which he had come, was accomplished.

As Beatrice disappeared from sight, he mechanically closed the door, and advanced back in the room, towards the writing table; at which she had been seated when he had first entered. He stood a little way off from it, and glanced first down at the papers lying on it, and then from them to the stiff, high chair, standing by.

His imagination was keenly alive. It was not Beatrice he saw sitting there, or her frigid tones he was listening to. It was his,—the father's, who had injured and insulted him;—*his* face, hard, sharp, tyrannical,—and *his* voice, bitter, sneering, keen-edged as a tempered razor.

He turned, with a quick movement, and walked towards the closed French window. With quick fingers, he noiselessly opened one side of it, and breathed heavily into the cold thick air, outside. He seemed, for the moment, relieved;—the atmosphere of the room had almost stifled him.

“Not long,—not long,” he muttered, “each moment weighs as an hour,—but, it cannot last,—it cannot.”

He turned again, and looked at the chair,

standing close by the writing-table ; but—as he did so, he started back. His mocking fancy had hold of him again, as in an iron grip. He was no longer master of himself. What picture she laid before him, was the true and living reality ;—what he was himself, or where he was himself, was the delusion, the sham.

The room, he was in, was not his father's library, but another room ; where lay a man, with the cold sweat of approaching death, standing on his brow. The face of this man was hideous, not so much with the agony of pain upon it, but with the awful horror that was transfixing it. Over the dying man—his own father,—Marcus Sinclair saw himself bending. Bending, with a look of hatred in his eyes, and yet—in his hand—holding a potion, the strength and value of which, he alone knew. Before it, Life would have the power to baffle once more the clutch of Death. Before it, the darkness which lowered down upon the sinking man, might lift. Yet,—though the son held in his hands, and knew the power of, this subtle potion,—he would not give it. The fire of

anger and revenge in his heart, was smouldering. Suddenly it flamed up, and he dashed the potion from him,—dashed it, and knew himself to be, by that act, his father's——?

Ah! what?—He was being half stifled again, the room was closing in around him,—there was air,—air somewhere,—near the window;—he would go towards it, if he could find it;—now, now he could breathe, now he could see,—he was still in the library, and by—himself; there was no one else there. And it was for Claire he was waiting; it was for her sake, he was here.—What was this about his father, though? He was ill, very ill upstairs. But, who said that his last hours were numbered,—that the sweat of death was already on his brow? Yet,—what was it to him,—he knew nothing of it—he had not come to try his physician's skill with it;—his father had cursed the genius that had lain in him, he had—because of it—turned him as a dog, from his house. Why,—why should he . . .

The five minutes, he had allowed Beatrice were over, aye more—six, seven minutes.

Should he give her ten, even with the probability of Lambert, at any moment, returning? How did he know though that Lambert had not already returned,—how did he know that he was not, at this very moment, preventing Beatrice from bringing Claire down to him?

No, he would not stay; he would bend his way to that narrow staircase, up which he had seen Beatrice disappear. Why had she gone that way,—it led to a part of the house little or never used, he remembered that,—was it altered now? Yet—why even, if it were altered, should Claire be there?

Without another moment's hesitation, and with a dark, foreboding fear weighing on his heart,—Dr. Sinclair strode to the door, opened it, and began making his way to the furthest end of the hall.

For the instant all was quiet, and he could only hear his own firm tread on the polished tiles. But, he had scarcely got mid-way across it, ere his steps faltered. A frenzied shriek from the upper part of the house, broke upon his ear. It was three times repeated, each time with greater force; and

was the high-uttered shriek of a man, struggling in the toils of delirium. What, —was the parting strength of James Islay being expended in this? Was the life that had been so hard and pitiless, being driven now in terror to the dark Unknown?

Marcus Sinclair's steps not only faltered, but stopped altogether. The three shrieks had seemed to embody the three syllables, of a single word; and, before the accusation of that word, his whole being quailed.

He heard a slow, uneven step on the stone paving, outside the great front doors. It might be Lambert's step,—might be him just returning. If Marcus Sinclair strode on just the few paces further, towards the narrow staircase,—he would be just before him. He would have time, perhaps, to find where Claire was located; time to have the vantage ground of being already with her, before Lambert could know it, or take means to prevent it.

Yet—

The three syllables that formed the one black-stained name, seemed written before Marcus Sinclair's clouded eyes, and sounding

in his deafened ears. Ah!—driven this time from the doors—*branded*,—with a worse than the curse of Cain upon his brow, and with more bitter words than the words of Cain, upon his tongue..

Too late?—No. He was not yet branded. The cry of despair and remorse was not yet parted from his lips.—Thank Heaven!

Marcus Sinclair strode,—not towards the narrow staircase, but to the right,—straight to the wide, open stairs. With rapid step he leapt up them; hearing, as he leapt, the swell and moan of another rising shriek. It came he could tell now, from the nearness of sound, from a room with the door closed fast, which lay a little along the broad passage, at the top of the stairs. To this room, without another pause or consideration, he made his way; and, with the authority and bearing of his profession, unlatched the door, and entered.

Three other physicians were already in the darkened room. Two of them holding the dying man as, in the gyves of wildest delirium, he sought to throw himself from the bed, on which he lay. The other was

pacing noiselessly up and down, holding his watch in his hand, and awaiting his turn.

The room was hot to stifling; the air heavy,—too heavy and too hot, though the dying man was bathed in the sweat of intensest fever.

Dr. Sinclair just bowed to the three medical men, as he entered; and then, passed up straight to the bedside. For a moment, as he laid his hand on the throbbing pulse and looked close into the contorted face, all swam before him, and his brain reeled. But, with stupendous effort of will, the emotion passed; and the man became the physician, and the effort to save life absorbed all power of thought and endeavour.

For a full two hours, Dr. Sinclair remained in that darkened room. The skill, for which his name was already becoming famous, had never before been put so severely to the test. The strange power, which could act as a kind of thaumaturgy upon the patient, was forced to its fullest extent,—to an extent, even, to which Dr. Sinclair himself, had never before had so direct, or confirmed,

a knowledge. At the end of the two hours, Dr. Sinclair had done all, that lay in the power of man to do. The rest had to be left to the strong striving force, which is the property of Life; and to the power and will (though the skilled physician acknowledged it not) of God, in whose hands, Life and Death lie.

Having fully written out and given his instructions, and with an authority which those present readily bent to (for in the same way as Beatrice first had, they were under the impression that Dr. Sinclair was one of the physicians, that morning telegraphed for) enforced them, Marcus Sinclair Islay prepared to leave the room. The office of physician was still upon him; the man, the injured son, the angry, unforgiving hater of his father,—was still held in forcible abeyance.

And it was well indeed, that it still was so. For, as Dr. Sinclair made his way to the door, his intent ears heard the advance of covert steps on the outside of the room. With precipitate haste, as he heard them, he turned and added with renewed force, one

immediate item of gravest importance, to the advice that he had already given. Then,—with calm stoicism, he opened the door, and encountered the man, whom he had had a powerful presentiment on hearing the steps, that he should encounter,—his cousin, Lambert Islay.

With a quick movement, he drew the door after him, and latched it. As he did so, he heard the sharp and rapid click of the turning of the key and the drawing of the bolt, from the inside.

The necessity for this step,—for the sake of obtaining the five hours' perfect quiet, in a room where Life was struggling, now no longer hopelessly, with Death—had been the item hastily enforced by Dr. Sinclair, previous to his quitting the room. And, something like a smile of triumph crossed his face, as he saw—standing close behind his cousin—an elderly man with the unmistakeable face and bearing of a lawyer; and knew that now, for the third time, he had been the means of baffling Lambert Islay in his crooked designs.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

RECOLLECTIONS.

“ MARC,—I am tired,—tired,—tired,—when, when shall I be rested, and feel like I used to again? Oh!—why did I ever go?”

“ It’s too late to say that now, Claire,—you *did* go, and though it was a mistake, as we now see,—what is done, is done. But, quite as much blame rests with me as with you, dear,—*that* ought to comfort you.”

“ No, it wasn’t your fault a bit, Marc,—it was all my own, because—you see, I *knew* you didn’t wish me to go, and I *knew* you thought it very foolish and weak of me,—and yet, I would go, because . . .”

She hesitated, and moved restlessly on the sofa, upon which she was lying.

It was three weeks since her brother had brought her, in a half-stupefied and unconscious state, back to his home in Abbeyslea; and yet, here she was still lying, too weak

and too thoroughly unnerved to do anything, but lie down and rest and doze, and sometimes talk to Marc, and bemoan what had taken place.

He was sitting by her side at the head of the couch, leaning one elbow upon it, and resting his head on his hand. There was a quieter, less self-occupied look upon his face, than was usual to it; perhaps the whole expression upon it was changing, or perhaps it was only the subdued light of the room, that had the effect of softening and calming what was still, as before, restless and moody-looking.

“ You *would* go, because you thought I was hard and narrow, in anything that concerned —*him*,”—he said gravely,—“ and you were quite right, Claire;—in one way, I was no right or unbiassed judge,—I could not be,—I could not even *now* be.”

“ Not after what you did?”—asked she earnestly, slightly raising herself, so that she could see his face as she spoke,—“ O Marc,—why do you say that? You cannot hate him as you used to,—you could not have hated him then as you did before, or you

couldn't have gone by your own free will, and done all that you could to save his life."

He shook his head.

"Yes, I could, Claire,"—he said slowly,—“for, I acted upon the impulse of the moment. The bitter humiliation it was to me, to enter that house,—had made me almost beside myself. I was not my own master,—I neither knew nor reasoned, with any clearness, upon what I was doing. Besides,—Claire, you know,—it was the other thing that drove me,—aye, literally drove me to it.”

She did not speak, for she knew what he meant. With a sigh, she let her head drop down to its former position; and listlessly folded her hands on the rug that lay over her.

"It was self,—self again,"—he went on with the sad bitterness that so often marred his tones,—“I saw myself branded, Claire,—I heard myself called by a name, by which no man or woman could ever look upon me again, without feelings of abhorrence,—I . . .”

"Yet,—it was only imagination, and perhaps,—perhaps, an aroused conscience,"—broke in Claire, in her low, weak voice,—

“you did not actually know he was so ill, or that . . .”

“Ah! but it all points in the same direction,”—said he,—“it was all for myself, that I did it. I, as good as, knew in what state he lay; but I did not use my skill or power for his sake, but for my own. It was for my *own* pride, my *own* satisfaction, my *own* honour,—it was to save myself from a life-long remorse and misery, which would always have been eating as a cankerworm into my very being. Don’t you see, Claire, how everything was for self, and that I am able and do—hate him, and bear him as much grudge now, as I ever did before? ”

She closed her great tired eyes; and over her pale face, which had lost some of its rounded contour, crept a look of weary protest.

“I see in a way, Marc, but—I can’t understand it,”—she said,—“because if *that* would have made you miserable all your life,—doesn’t this same unnatural hatred and unforgiveness, eat as a cankerworm into you,—as you call it? ”

“I don’t know,—I mean it is difficult to

say,"—he said, after a pause,—“if the circumstances of my life had been different, I should have been different. But, I can't alter what has already been done. I can't be, as if what has been, had not been. We are all the creatures of what Chance Good or Evil, bitter or sweet, justice or injustice—make us. Yet . . .”

A burning flush spread all over her face.

“ You don't believe that, Marc,”—she said, her tones trembling,—“ why do you say things that you don't really believe ? ”

“ How do you know that I don't believe in the truth of those words, that I said ? ”—he asked, not harshly, but doggedly.

“ Because you don't, Marc,”—she replied steadily. “ Anyone who has spoken to Mr. Liddon, and seen him and knows what his life is,—must know that no creature born in the Earth is the creature of Chance. And no contrary circumstances or injustice, need make a man less noble, less high-minded, or less natural, than he is meant to be. Neither you nor I, you know, Marc,—can have the same ideas, as we used to have.”

It was a great effort to her, to speak out

like this. But, even in her weakness, she was stronger and more decided in thought and speech than she used to be.

The flush of colour died off her face, and left it even paler than it was before. It had been an exertion to her, yet she felt happier and more at rest for the effort, she had made.

He sighed rather impatiently.

“I think women can change their ideas and opinions very much more quickly, than men can,”—he said, laying his hand gently on her dark hair, and stroking it while he spoke. “You are much softer and much more easily moved creatures, than we are,—you know, Claire. I don’t say that you are fickle,—you’re not that,—it is rather that you must be so impressionable and able to transfer your trusts.—Do you remember, not so very many months ago, when you used to trust *me* in everything?”

“Yes,”—she answered.

“And now?”—said he, smiling, as he bent down to her.

“It is all different,”—she replied, smiling back at him, for there was quite peace

between them upon this point,—“you see I have grown into a woman now, Marc,—I was such a girl before. I think half of me must have been asleep, or covered up, or something.”

“Ah!”—said he; and that was all he said just then upon that subject, though he felt an inclination to sift the meaning of what she said, a little more closely.

But, she was weak and ill, and he must watch over her tenderly, not only with a doctor's care, but with a brother's guarding love and tacit insight. He was learning to know, that the whole confidence and faith that he had once had, was most surely slipping from him; but somehow, the knowledge of this, did not seem so bitter to him, as he once thought it would. He did not grudge what he saw was becoming, expanded and beautified by being taken from him. He did not long for the blind devotion and worship, that he had once had; knowing that that had been of far less service and real sweetness to him, than the ennobling influence and interchange of ideas, that there was now beginning to exist between them.

—The six long days that Claire had spent at Islay Court, were looked back upon now, by her, as upon a confused and ugly nightmare. She could scarcely tell what she had, or what she had not done, during the time she had been there. All she vaguely knew was,—that she had been thwarted, sneered at, and disbelieved in, in all that she had tried to do or to say.

She had seen Beatrice sometimes, but not often, it was generally Lambert, always Lambert,—talking in his silly, affected way, and using terms and expressions to her, which had made her hate and despise him all the more.

This must have happened for the first few days ; then,—she had openly and angrily rebelled, at the treatment she was receiving. She had implored to be allowed to leave the house,—to return to her brother,—to rectify the mistake she had made in believing what Lambert had said, when — after all — her father could not have wished to see her, as she had not even been allowed to go near the part of the house in which he was. What was the good of her being there ?

She remembered, that what she had said, must have aroused Lambert and brought him to a point, for he had told her plainly then the real reason for which he had brought her to Islay Court; and the underhand and base way in which he meant to obtain her father's signature to an altered will,—in which not only half the money was to be made over to her, but, also the greater part of the property. After hearing this, she remembered the passion of tears and anger that had come over her,—the contemptuous withdrawal of Lambert,—and, after a while, the entrance of Beatrice, less frigid and hard than usual, and more caring for her comfort and sympathetic than she had yet been. She remembered still more dimly, drinking the quieting cordial, she had brought her; and, that afterwards, Beatrice had promised her a great many things, which—somehow—together with the drowsy feeling that seemed to creep over her, were both pleasant and reassuring.

Then,—everything was as a troubled and broken dream. All day long she had seemed to be writing to Marc, telling him of what

was taking place, telling him again and again all those same things that she had already written and told him about, many times before, and to which he seemed never to pay any heed.

Yet, all the time she was lying down, with a dull sense of knowing nothing, and caring for nothing ; only, wanting to rest. Once only, had she—apparently—been able to rouse herself, and that was, when, with clouded eye and stupid brain, she had watched one of the maids—who had charge of the rooms in which she had been placed—read over and over again, a letter she had evidently just received. The sight of that letter had the effect of acting as a kind of fillip upon her. She had melted the maid's heart by her passionate and earnest appeal, and then gained her promise, both to secretly post the few lines that she—Claire—wrote to her brother, and—also—to assist her to escape from the house, the morning of the day that she arranged to be at Irondridge.

So far, Claire had been able to disclose to her brother by degrees,—as it had come back to her. It all seemed much more plain

to her, than it had at first; for, the effects of the drugs which had, evidently, been constantly administered, took some days in wearing off.

After the writing of those few guarded lines, she remembered nothing. Her brain had been clear enough when she had written them, but it must have been a very few moments after, that—either—Lambert, or Beatrice, had come, and they must have persuaded her—as she was so much better and brighter—to eat or drink something,—though she had made up her mind, owing to the curious state in which she felt she was, to be guarded and careful in accepting what was offered her.

“And why, Claire, didn’t you put more in that letter?”—Marcus had asked her very gravely, as she had slowly told him about the writing of that short note, which had brought him to Ironbridge, and—afterwards—to Islay Court,—“a few more words about the treatment you were receiving, and about the helpless state in which you were,—would have brought me straight to you, instead of waiting for you all those hours at Ironbridge.”

“Oh! but, Marc,—I couldn’t,” she had said in reply, “I didn’t want you to know it was all so bad, until it was over. And I thought, that, with the maid who was with me most constantly, on my side and willing to help me,—and Lambert not coming in quite so often as he did at one time,—it wouldn’t be so very difficult. And,—Marc, you know,—I wouldn’t have written a word, that would have forced you to come to the house to fetch me, when I knew of the vow that you never meant to break, and of the pride you never meant to lower. I couldn’t, as it were, tell you all, and thus seem to ask you to come,—though I did add that one sentence to show you that I *mightn’t* be able to do, as I had arranged.”

She spoke seriously, and he took what she said seriously; but, for all that, he tried to pass it lightly off.

“The Islay and the Sinclair pride must be very nearly allied in your nature,—and thus, doubly strong, Claire,” he said, though knowing and feeling that it was something more than pride that had limited the few words in the short letter he had received

from her,—“ yet, I thought my little sister was the only sensible one among us, and had none ! ”

She had looked at him for a moment in silence, and then had said, rather wistfully —

“ I'm not proud, Marc ;—you know, you and Beatrice have so much pride, though of different sorts, that you left none for me. It was something much bigger than pride that kept that letter so short and guarded.”

And so it was. The strength and potency of *love*, occupied a far higher position in Claire's nature, than did pride ; and, it was love for her brother and regard for what touched him, she knew, most dearly, and *not* pride, that—even in the midst of her need—had penned those few careful words.

—Dr. Sinclair's account of what had happened to himself, and of the means he had taken, both to see Claire and to carry her away from Islay Court,—was, as usual, very short and disjointed.

“ What is done, is done,” he would say, “ I daresay it might have been much better done, and probably would have, if it had

been done by someone else, and not me. But, if there is nothing very agreeable in the remembrance, or pleasant in the narration of it,—what possible gratification can there be to dilate upon it ? Let it die,—there will be no harm done to anyone, by its dying ; and, therefore, to my mind, that's the fittest ending for it *now*,—not after it has been dragged up and down, and remarked upon, and lauded or condemned, and a variety of other matter affixed to it.”

Not that Sinclair’s sister was at all the kind of girl to wish to do this ; but, at times, he liked to ruminate upon what was done, outside his own quiet home.

In reality, Dr. Sinclair had found his efforts to see Claire, and his arrangement for her removal, far easier than he had anticipated. This was well ; for, physically strong man as he was, the strain upon his nerves since early that morning, had been of the severest. The walk over the moorland,—the sudden encounter and temptation,—the interview with Beatrice,—the seven long minutes, when imagination had seemed to take the place of fact,—and the two hours’

suppression of all feeling and emotion that he had spent in the office of physician only,—were parts which a man is not often called upon to play, in rapid succession. And though, Dr. Sinclair's smile had been one of triumph as, at the lock of the door, he had looked at the faces of the baffled schemer and his accomplice,—it was with a weary heart that he thought of what might still lie before him, and of the little strength he had left, in which to do it. But, human nature is seldom tried beyond its powers; and, what Dr. Sinclair had done,—and what he maintained he had only done strictly for his own honour and satisfaction—had been the hardest and most trying part of what he had to do.

Lambert had been led on little by little to do more than he had, at first, intended. If he had pre-designed all that he had ultimately done, he would have given up the whole affair and concern, with a shrug of his shoulders, and an exclamation relative to it not being worth his while. But, he had not arranged beforehand, any further than the bare outlines of what he should do. He had thought of the unoccupied, though furnished,

part of the house, as being serviceable for locating Claire ; providing he found her intractable both, in remaining more than a few days in the house, and, also in reference to his tacit engagement to her. And he had, consequently, bribed two maids to attend to these rooms, that were set apart from the others in the house ; and to obey strictly his orders in connection with the occupant of them. But, further than this, Lambert had scarcely troubled himself to plan. In his mind, it was all to arrange itself fairly easily ; although the step Dr. Sinclair had taken in accompanying him and Claire as far as Irondridge, had somewhat materially affected the course of his designs. However, even with this, he had only to change his tactics slightly, and wait to press his suit, when Claire was once under the roof of Islay Court, and—practically—under his care and in his power. That he had not acquainted Beatrice with his intention, did not trouble him in the least ; for, he knew by her constant attendance upon her father, during his two days' absence, that she would become fully aware of his, Lambert's, wish, design,

and purpose. And, Lambert *had*, upon his arrival, found himself perfectly correct in this conjecture. Beatrice met Claire with a frigidity and severity, and with a reference to her position,—which informed Lambert, at once, that it was all right on her side. She evidently knew, and—was extremely angry and put out about it.

But,—in another calculation he had made, he was not equally happy. He had reckoned upon the facts, that his uncle would, during his absence, have expended all his wrath,—have recognised his own impotency in his clever nephew's hands—and have felt his pride outweigh everything in connection with the Islay name and property. But, this was not so. He found his uncle's wrath ten times more aroused by the lapse of time. He vowed that he would never see Claire again, that every farthing of his money should go to Beatrice, and every acre of property, too. He, also, hurled anathemas upon his spendthrift of a nephew, whose whole aim and object, he saw, was to drive him out of the world, in order to marry his disowned child, and yet to get, through her, both the Islay

property and money. But,—as usual,—Lambert was in no desperate hurry; the old man would soon wear himself out if he went on in this way; besides—on the whole, the game he was playing was becoming rather entertaining by all this variety of minor moves being introduced into it.

After this, however, Lambert had found the moves, rather more rapid and serious, than he had anticipated; but as he never claimed to be the holder of very high morals, or of any kind of conscience whatsoever,—he was easily carried on by the course of events.—Claire's passionate rebellion had led him to the cool narration, of what he had already done, and of what he still intended doing.—The necessity for keeping her quiet and at bay, for still some days longer, led him to consider the excellent effects of drugs.—The doubtless policy of keeping in with Beatrice,—even though he had already offended both her dignity, and the real feeling that she had for him—caused him to lie liberally to her, both in connection with his premeditated transfer of affection, and in reference to the quieting potions he wished

her to administer to Claire.—And, finally, the natural sequence to the protracted outburst of wrath,—which in James Islay's critical state had been most serious,—had given him the opening, to deliberately form that design, for the alteration of his uncle's will. He had, however,—unfortunately for himself—left this final move rather late. His own cleverness in purposely putting off this deed, until the delirium which had seized James Islay was at its height, and until the physicians had given up all hope that the exhausted man would survive the day,—was made of no account, by the arrival of Dr. Sinclair.

Lambert's patience and ingenuity, had come well-nigh to an end, by this time. He had vowed roundly, when he had found himself out in the dense fog of that morning, obliged, himself, to do, what he dared not trust anyone else to do. He had even gone so far as to call himself a fool for his trouble, and to tell himself that the whole affair, even if it succeeded, was not worth the candle; was not worth the inconvenience and bother, to which he had been obliged to put himself.

He had sought, previous to quitting the house, to fortify himself in his usual way, in order that he might get well through, what he considered, the most difficult part of the whole concern. But, his means of fortifying himself, had proved, rather, his bane than his good, in giving him a happy-go-lucky and careless negligence of time, and of the necessity there was for skilful diplomacy.

The step Dr. Sinclair had heard outside the front door,—as he stood irresolute in the hall,—had not been Lambert's. The latter had not returned, with his accomplice, to Islay Court, until within half-an-hour of Dr. Sinclair's exit, from his father's room. That half-hour Lambert had spent in his uncle's library, in company with the lawyer. And, it was not till that was passed, and the few final arrangements completed,—that the two men had made their way upstairs.

Lambert's astonishment at confronting Marcus Sinclair, outside the very room in which the latter's father lay,—was even beyond his usual powers of covering. Knowing the pride of his cousin's temper, and knowing of the entire alienation there

was between father and son,—the possibility of the latter's ever stooping, at any price, to again enter Islay Court,—had never occurred to him. He had expected to receive, after a while, threatening letters from Marcus, in connection with Claire; but, further than this, Lambert's selfish nature could not possibly divine. To conclude that, for the sake of his sister, Dr. Sinclair was capable of sacrificing his own prejudices and pride, was of course out of Lambert's range of comprehension altogether.—Therefore, when he was met just at the very threshold of James Islay's room, by James Islay's disinherited son,—Lambert was completely taken aback.

“ The man's not only a conceited and dastardly coxcomb, but a coward,” Dr. Sinclair had said to Claire, when cursorily relating, what had happened to him after his withdrawal from the room,—“ he literally shook, as he saw me. It was partly with anger, I know, at the complete overthrow of his knave's plans,—but, it was partly also with fear,—fear, I expect, at the state in which I should find you, Claire.”

Dr. Sinclair had neither stayed to explain the meaning of his presence there, nor to remark upon the very evident frustration of his cousin's designs; but with one word in reference to James Islay's more favourable condition,—had moved past Lambert and the lawyer, along the passage, towards the broad staircase. He had heard Lambert turn and follow him, uttering imprecations and sneering insinuations as to his—Marcus's—motives for entering Islay Court at this time. But neither were worthy of notice; and, with rapid steps, Marcus reached the bottom of the stairs, crossed the hall, and made his way up that side, narrow flight, which led he knew from the direction Beatrice had taken—to the part of the house in which Claire was located. And then, either Lambert, seeing that Dr. Sinclair already knew where his sister was, and seeing that his other plan in connection with the will was frustrated,—thought that the whole game was up, and that he had better make a dignified and easy withdrawal from it,—or else he had the germs of some fresh design in his head. But, all that Dr. Sinclair knew,

was,—that he was allowed, without let or hindrance, to take his own way. This being so, his arrangements in connection with the immediate removal of Claire, had been of the easiest.

To Claire, on looking back and hearing her brother's account of what had happened, it seemed most curious and incomprehensible that Marcus's feelings in reference to his father could be *now*, as they were before. How could he now hate, when he had essayed to save? How could he still remain unforgiving, when his very act had been one of forgiveness?—Sinclair's reason, however, for this seeming inconsistency, was clear enough. It was only that her nature was different to his; and that which remained of vital and changeless importance to him,—became to her, by that single impulsive and impelled action, a thing of no account.

Yet,—he was perfectly right in his own judgment, upon his own deed. It had not been wrought through any feeling of forgiveness or charity; it had been done in the frenzied wish to save his own honour, and to secure for himself peace of mind, instead of

life-long remorse. Thus,—in the sight of God—that act of Dr. Sinclair,—though apparently an act of forgiveness,—was of no account whatsoever. For—“That which is done *without* charity, profiteth nothing.” And though Marcus Sinclair had still but wavering notions of the truths and beauties of real Christianity, it was true as Claire had said—that the several times that both he and she had seen Mr. Liddon, and heard him speak,—could no more allow them to hold exactly the same views, that they might have before; than if they had laid a book of enlightenment open before their eyes, perused, admired and discussed some of its contents, and then—disclaimed all knowledge of, and interest in, it.

END OF VOL. II.







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